



**POSITION STATEMENT OF PPS AND PIDSP
ON THE MEASLES OUTBREAK**

(January 7, 2014)



Immunization is the most cost-effective preventive health measure in this century. Mass Immunization Programs worldwide have eradicated small pox and significantly reduced the incidence of vaccine preventable diseases like diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, hepatitis B, *Haemophilus influenzae* type B disease, measles, mumps and rubella. Measles, being a vaccine preventable illness may be eliminated.

We, the Philippine Pediatric Society and the Pediatric Infectious Disease Society of the Philippines, are seriously concerned by the increasing cases of measles which is a highly preventable disease affecting the most vulnerable and the ones most in need of our protection. As reported by the measles Reference Laboratory of RITM, there were 500 and 482 laboratory-confirmed cases in November and December respectively. As Pediatricians and Pediatric Infectious Disease Specialist, who are in the front lines of the battle against childhood diseases, especially vaccine-preventable diseases, this situation is unacceptable.

We recommend the following:

- massive information dissemination regarding the disease and its manifestations for early recognition and especially its complications. It is also important to communicate about the serious effects of the illness if it spreads.
- encourage health professionals and the general public about the urgent need to check their children's immunization status and to update the measles vaccination status.
- the administration of measles vaccine to children with incomplete or no previous vaccination. In outbreak areas, where measles involves infants <12 months of age and have ongoing risk for exposure, measles vaccine can be given as early as 6 months of age.
- post-exposure prophylaxis within 72 hours or 3 days after exposure to children who get exposed and this may provide some protection or modify the clinical course of measles. This may also provide protection for future exposures.

- support in the massive vaccination program of the Department of Health. Catch-up vaccination campaigns may help increase vaccination coverage as well.

Measles is an extremely contagious illness that is transmitted from person to person by direct contact with respiratory droplets or via airborne spread. After exposure to a case of measles, approximately 90% of susceptible individuals develop measles. It takes about 10 to 12 days from the time the individual gets exposed to development of symptoms. Measles is infectious from 4 days before to 4 days after the appearance of the rash. The most common complications associated with measles are pneumonia, otitis media and diarrhea. The risk of death from measles or its complications is higher in infants, young children, and adults than older children and adolescents. In low to middle income countries like the Philippines, where malnutrition and vitamin A deficiency is common, measles is more severe and associated with a high case-fatality rate. Due to the high infectivity of the measles virus, even a small percentage of susceptible persons are sufficient to maintain viral circulation in a population.

Before the introduction of the measles vaccination program, almost every person acquired measles before adulthood. After introduction of the measles vaccination program in the Philippines, initially covering about 35% of the birth cohort in 1982 and subsequently 100% in 1983, there was a dramatic decline in the number of cases.

Based on the report from the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM), which is the national reference laboratory for measles of the Department of Health, the number of laboratory-confirmed cases has been increasing since March 2013 with the highest number in November and December 2013. Most of the cases were reported from the National Capital Region, Region 4A and Region 6 affecting mostly children <2 years of age.

This is a time that calls for cooperation by every Filipino. Measles is a vaccine-preventable disease and the vaccines available are highly effective and found to be safe. Let us all work with the government and increase our vaccination coverage. We believe that one act, multiplied by 93 million Filipinos will definitely turn the situation around.

We help bring life into the world, let us all work together in keeping that life in this world. Let us look forward to a measles-free nation. Let us all look forward to life. We Pediatricians do.