



Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Health and Environment

Ministerial Statement to the
House of Assembly

by the Minister of Health, Seniors and Environment

The Honourable Jeanne J. Atherden, JP, MP

On 6th June, 2014

"VACCINE PREVENTABLE DISEASE AND WORLD CUP"

Mr. Speaker,

Even though there has already been press coverage around this issue, I believe that the matter is important enough that I should again bring it to the attention of Honourable Members and the public. It is for that reason that I rise to provide a reminder about the importance of vaccine preventable diseases for Bermuda and the Americas. In particular, there is a need to protect Bermuda from the risk of imported measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda shares, with the rest of the world, our excitement about the upcoming FIFA World Cup taking place in Brazil for one month beginning on the 12th of June. The event is expected to attract at least half a million visitors to Brazil, and some of those visitors will be Bermuda residents. Of the 32 countries participating, 19 have reported cases of measles. As a result, there is the potential for persons to come into contact with someone with measles during this period, either on site or en route.

Mr. Speaker, The Americas was the first region of the world to eradicate polio. The region is in the final stages of documenting and verifying the elimination of measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome through the International Expert Committee. The current evidence for the English speaking Caribbean sub region suggests that measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome have already been eliminated. Bermuda shares in the global responsibility for reducing the transmission of vaccine preventable disease.

Mr. Speaker, you may be aware that Bermuda has had no confirmed indigenous case of measles or rubella since 1990 and 1991, respectively. There are two factors that can be attributed to this success. The first is the high vaccination coverage for children at 15 months of age and a booster dose before adolescence; the second is the early identification and containment of any suspect case of measles captured through the Epidemiology and Surveillance Programme.

Mr. Speaker, public perception about the safety and effectiveness of the MMR vaccine and a link with autism was based on one international study published in 1998. The study has since been retracted but not without creating significant vaccine hesitancy among large populations, primarily in Europe and North America as well as Bermuda. The decline in vaccine uptake specifically for MMR has resulted in the re-emergence of measles globally. As a consequence, there has been death and disability in children affected by measles outbreaks in those jurisdictions, many of whom were not vaccinated. Measles is highly infectious and occurs commonly in certain parts of the world and the risk of importation of measles through travel is real.

Mr. Speaker, there is a need to protect vulnerable populations in remote parts of the world who may have reduced access to health care, including vaccines. Bermuda also seeks to ensure its residents are protected from the risk of an imported case of measles. In addition, Bermuda is committed in its efforts toward the elimination of measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome in the Caribbean sub region and the Americas by extension. In order for Bermuda to sustain the gains that have been achieved in the area of vaccine preventable diseases we encourage the community to follow the Bermuda Immunization Schedule for children and adults.

Parents and guardians are encouraged to ensure their child is adequately vaccinated against MMR in order to protect them from an imported case of measles or rubella. The Bermuda Childhood Immunization Schedule recommends the first dose of MMR be given at 15 months of age and a booster by age 5 years.

The Department of Health also recommends that persons traveling to the World Cup receive two doses of MMR in their lifetime. This will protect travellers from measles, if exposed, and prevent transmission to Bermuda residents on their return.

If residents become ill on return to Bermuda, in particular with a fever and rash, they should seek prompt medical care. This will enable community participation in the monitoring and surveillance of diseases of interest for Bermuda and the entire region. Protecting the health of infants, children and pregnant women from measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome is a core function of the Department of Health.

Mr. Speaker, The Ministry of Health, Seniors and the Environment understands the inextricable link between global travel and disease transmission. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge other risks associated with travel abroad. The risks to health include water, food and mosquito borne illnesses, personal safety, as well as drug, alcohol and sexual risk taking behaviour. As such the Department of Health operates a Travel Clinic with dedicated Medical Officers and Community Health Nurses to ensure travellers are informed about the risks and responsibilities associated with healthful decision making.

Persons are encouraged to book an appointment in advance of planned travel for a Travel Health Consultation by calling 278-6460 and obtain more information on prevention. The Ministry of Health, Seniors and Environment's vision of "Healthy People in Healthy Communities" requires the participation of all its residents both here and when abroad.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**