

Measles

Information Sheet for Contacts

This fact sheet is for people who have been in contact with someone with measles. People who are not immune to measles can get it if they are in contact with someone who has measles.

What is measles?

- Measles is a serious and highly infectious viral disease that can make people very sick and can lead to hospitalisation or, in rare cases, death.
- It is spread from person to person through the air by breathing, sneezing or coughing. Just being in the same room as someone with measles can lead to infection if you are not immunised. One person with measles can pass on the disease to 18 other people who have not been immunised.
- The early symptoms include fever, cough, runny nose, sore red eyes and white spots inside the mouth. After three to five days a rash appears on the face and then moves down the body.
- Up to one in three people with measles develops complications including ear infections and pneumonia.
- Acute encephalitis (brain inflammation) develops in one in 1,000 cases, some of whom die and more than one third are left with permanent brain damage. Pregnant women who get measles are at risk of miscarriage, stillbirth and having a low birth weight baby.
- One in 1,000 people with measles may die and one in 10 cases will end up in hospital.
- The best protection against measles is immunisation with a vaccine called MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella).

Who is at risk of getting measles?

- Anyone born after 1 January 1969, who isn't up to date for measles vaccine, or has not had measles already, is at risk of catching the disease. This includes babies, children, and adults.
- Anyone with a weakened immune system (for example, people who are receiving chemotherapy or radiotherapy for cancer, or people who take high-dose steroid medications) is at risk of measles infection even if they have had measles in the past or been immunised.
- When measles is widespread a very small proportion of people who have been immunised may also get measles.

What is a measles contact?

- "Contacts" are people who shared the same air with someone while they were infectious with measles (for example, by being in the same room as someone with measles).
- Contacts who are not immune to measles may become infected and spread measles to other people even before they start to feel very sick. It takes 7-14 days for a contact who has become infected with the measles virus to start to have symptoms.

Some people are considered high risk contacts - these include non-immune pregnant women, people with a weak immune system (from illness or medicine) and infants under 15 months old.

If you think you (your child) are at high risk, and have been in contact with someone with measles, please call your doctor / maternity carer / specialist as soon as possible for advice.

What to do if you have been in contact with measles?

- People who have been in contact with measles and are not immune need to stay in isolation.
- If you were born before 1969, or you are up to date with the measles vaccine, you are considered immune and it is very unlikely that you will catch measles. You don't need to do anything different.
- If you are unsure of your measles immunity you should speak with your family doctor.

What is isolation (quarantine)?

- Isolation is for non-immune people who have been in contact with someone with measles. It is an important part of stopping measles spreading in the community, especially to high risk people.
- Isolation (quarantine) means staying at home and away from daycare/school/work, group and social activities, sports and recreation events and public places like cinemas and shopping malls.
- You should only see people who are immune to measles when you are in isolation.

How long will I be in isolation (quarantine)?

- Your (your child's) time of isolation starts 7 days after your first contact with measles.
- Your (your child's) time of isolation finishes 14 days after your last contact with measles.

What happens if I (my child) become unwell while in isolation?

- Look out for the signs and symptoms of measles including a runny nose, cough, sore eyes, fever, or a raised red rash that starts on the face and moves to cover the rest of the body.
- If you think you (your child) are developing signs of measles while you are in isolation you should call your family doctor for advice.
- There is no specific treatment for measles. Supportive treatment includes rest, plenty of fluids, and paracetamol for fever.
- If you (your child) need to see a doctor, please phone the medical centre or hospital before you go so they can isolate you to prevent the spread of measles in their clinic.
- If you (your child) are diagnosed with measles while you are in isolation, you need to stay in isolation until five days after the measles rash starts.
- Even if you did get measles it's worth having the MMR immunisation once you have recovered, as it also protects against rubella and mumps.

What happens if I (my child) do not become unwell while in isolation?

- If you (your child) don't get measles you can come out of isolation after 14 days from your last exposure to someone with measles.
- If you are not up to date with MMR vaccination you should arrange with your GP to be immunised. Immunisation with MMR is free for anyone born after 1 January 1969. MMR is given at 15 months and 4 years as part of the National Immunisation Schedule.

What is the public health response?

- Doctors, hospitals and laboratories must notify cases of measles to the local Public Health Service.
- The Public Health Service traces contacts of people with measles and provides advice to people with measles, their contacts and their doctors on managing people with measles. This is to try to limit the spread in the community.

The best way to stop you or your child catching measles is getting immunised. If you suspect you or your child is sick with measles phone your GP or Healthline on 0800 611 116.

For more information on immunisation please call the Immunisation Advisory Centre free on 0800 IMMUNE (0800 466 863) or visit their website www.immune.org.nz.

For further information please contact:



MidCentral Public Health Service
Palmerston North: (06) 350 9110
Whanganui: (06) 348 1775

