

Measles Fact Sheet

What is Measles?

Measles is a highly infectious illness caused by a virus. It may cause serious complications. In the past, measles was very common but immunisation has now made it rare.

What are the symptoms?

The first symptoms are fever, cough, runny nose, and sore red eyes. A red blotchy rash appears about four days later.

Fever is typically still present when the rash starts. The rash usually starts on the face then spreads down to the body. The rash may last for up to a week. People usually feel and look unwell.

One in three people will have a complication. Complications are more common in young children and adults and include ear infections, diarrhoea and lung infections.

About one in every 1 000 people with measles develops swelling of the brain (encephalitis).

How is it spread?

Measles is one of the most easily spread infections. It is spread when someone coughs or sneezes. You can get infected just by being in the same room as someone with measles.

People are infectious from four days before the rash until four days after the rash first appears. The rash usually starts about 14 days after you have had contact with someone who has measles.

Who is at risk?

Anyone is at risk if they come into contact with measles during the infectious period, particularly if they have not been infected with measles in the past or have not received two doses of vaccine.

How is it diagnosed?

Measles can be difficult to diagnose early because other viruses cause similar illnesses. The timing of the fever and the rash, and the characteristics of the rash can help a doctor to make the diagnosis.

If a doctor thinks you may have measles, samples from the nose, throat, blood or urine can be collected.

Confirming the diagnosis is important so that other people who may be at risk of measles can be identified and to prevent the spread of disease to others.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Care involves rest, fluids, paracetamol to reduce fever and observation for complications.

How is it prevented?

While someone is infectious with measles it is important they stay at home to prevent spreading it to other people.

The best protection against measles is immunisation. The measles vaccine also protects against mumps and rubella and is often called MMR (measles, mumps and rubella).

The MMRV vaccine also protects against chickenpox (varicella).

MMR vaccine is safe and effective. It has been used worldwide for many years. It is safe to have even if you have had a measles infection or a measles vaccination before.

Many older adults (those born before 1 January 1966) are immune to measles because they were infected as children. However, young adults may not have had measles infection or received two doses of MMR vaccine and are at risk.

Who should get immunised?

Measles-containing vaccine is routinely recommended for all children at 12 months and 18 months of age. These two doses of measles-containing vaccine protect against measles in almost all those vaccinated.

Anyone born during or after 1966 should have two doses of measles vaccine. This is particularly important for healthcare workers, childcare workers and people travelling overseas.

What should I do if I have had contact with someone who has Measles?

'Contacts' are people who shared the same air with someone who was infectious with measles (for example, being in the same room).

Many contacts will be immune to measles because of past measles infection or immunisation and will not get the disease.

It is sometimes possible to stop the infection in people who are not protected either by giving MMR vaccine or by giving normal human immunoglobulin.

If it is less than three days (72 hours) since you came into contact with measles, immunisation with MMR vaccine can prevent infection.

If it is between three and six days (73 to 144 hours) since you came into contact with measles, an injection of immunoglobulin can reduce the

chance of you developing measles. This injection contains antibodies against the measles virus that work quickly.

Immunoglobulin is also sometimes used for people who cannot have MMR vaccine such as infants less than nine months old, pregnant women and those with diseases or treatments that weaken their immune system.

Look out for symptoms of measles. The first symptoms of measles are fever, cough, runny nose, and sore red eyes. The rash starts a few days later.

If you are a 'contact', you may go on to develop measles symptoms seven to 18 days later.

It is a not good idea to be around anyone who may be at risk of catching measles from you until 18 days after you had contact with the person diagnosed with measles.

What should I do if I have Measles?

If you or your child has symptoms of measles you should seek medical care as soon as possible.

You should phone ahead to the doctor's surgery or hospital to let them know you may have measles.

This will allow them to plan your visit by supplying you with a mask and isolating you to prevent the infection spreading to staff or other patients.

If you have measles you should stay away from public places such as work, school, childcare and shopping centres, and not use public transport until cleared by a doctor or public health professional.

For more information

Call the Public Health Hotline – Tasmania on **1800 671 738** to speak to a clinical nurse consultant.

06/09/2016