

13 August 2019

Measles – key messages

Immunisation is the best way to protect against getting measles. Two doses of the MMR vaccine give 99 percent protection against the virus. In New Zealand the MMR vaccine is part of the National Immunisation Schedule and is offered free at 15 months and at 4 years of age. The MMR vaccine is also free for those under 50 years who have not had 2 documented doses.

The Ministry of Health and the affected District Health Board will work together to identify the best approach if there is a measles outbreak in a particular region.

Contact tracing and case management remain the best approach to containing the spread of the disease when it is present in the community.

Current situation

- Measles is circulating in New Zealand, particularly in the Auckland region.
- More cases are likely and people are encouraged to be vigilant of the symptoms of measles.
- The Ministry is keeping in close contact with DHBs and PHARMAC as they respond to an increase of cases in their communities.
- Detailed information about measles cases is included in weekly reports published by ESR: https://surv.esr.cri.nz/PDF_surveillance/MeaslesRpt/2019/WeeklyMeasles06052019.pdf

Immunisation is the best protection

- We want to ensure our national immunisation schedule continues on track and children receive their free routine MMR immunisations on time at 15 months and 4 years of age.
- Our priority is for people, especially children, who have not been vaccinated at all to get vaccinated.
- We also want to encourage teenagers and young adults who have never been vaccinated to get immunised.
- MMR vaccine is free for those under 50 years who have not had 2 documented doses.
- One dose of vaccine is effective in 95% of people. After two doses, more than 99% people are protected.
- Our standard MMR immunisation advice is that everyone born from 1969 needs two doses to be fully protected.
- Measles used to be very common, so those over 50 are considered immune and don't need the measles immunisations.

Overseas outbreaks

- There are currently significant measles outbreaks overseas.
- The Ministry of Health is advising people travelling overseas to make sure they are fully immunised against measles before they go.
- Preliminary global data from the World Health Organization shows that reported cases of measles rose by 300 percent in the first three months of 2019, compared to the same period in 2018.
- Measles is an ever present threat given the number of outbreaks overseas and because it is highly infectious.
- Since 2012, all cases of measles in New Zealand came from travellers bringing the disease from overseas.

Symptoms

- The first symptoms of measles include a fever, cough, runny nose and sore and watery 'pink eyes'. This is followed by a blotchy rash.
- If you catch measles you're infectious 5 days before and until 5 days after the rash appears.

Stopping the spread

- Measles is a very infectious viral illness that can be life threatening.
- It spreads easily from person to person.
- If you or a family member suspect you have measles you should stay at home and call Healthline on 0800 611 116 or your doctor to alert them of your symptoms. If you have measles it is important to avoid spreading it to others in the waiting room.
- If you're feeling sick, you should stay away from work, school or public places, to help prevent putting other people at risk.
- Isolating yourself you will help protect vulnerable people including babies, pregnant women, cancer patients and others who are unable to be immunised and for whom the impact of the disease can be devastating.

Vaccine Supply

- The Ministry is keeping in close contact with PHARMAC, who advise there is enough vaccine in New Zealand to handle any reactive increase in vaccination demand and maintain our national immunisation schedule.

Under 12 month olds

- The best protection for very young children is to ensure that those around them are vaccinated. This means ensuring family members, whanau and carers are vaccinated.
- In general, only children under 12 months who are travelling to countries with uncontrolled outbreaks of measles should receive the vaccine.
- Our current advice is that babies under 12 months old who are living in or travelling to Auckland do not need an additional early dose of the MMR vaccine.
- Antibodies transferred from the mother to the baby can provide some protection and make the MMR vaccine less effective until about 1 year of age. Because the vaccine's effectiveness is lower for babies under 12 months of age, if they are given the vaccine, they will still need two further doses of the vaccine once they turn 1 year old for long term protection.
- The MMR vaccine can be given to children as young as 6 months old after consultation with their doctor. If a parent has concerns about their individual situation they should talk to their family Doctor.

Protecting the vulnerable

- Measles has a more than 50% death rate for New Zealand children with low immunity, such as those receiving cancer treatment. These children shouldn't get immunised against measles. To protect them, it's important those around them are immunised so that we cannot spread the illness.
- Pregnant women shouldn't get immunised against measles. If you're pregnant and think you may have measles, or have come in contact with someone with measles, you should call your general practice, lead maternity carer or Healthline on 0800 611 116 as soon as possible.

Measles at school

- If there are measles cases at a child's school, children who have not been immunised or who are immunocompromised need to stay away from school until the risk of getting measles has passed. Information about when it is safe to return to school is given by the local Medical Officer of Health.
- The DHB's Medical Officer of Health can direct individual students who are at risk of transmitting measles to stay at home.
- Where the transmission risk is more wide-spread, after consulting with the school principal, the Medical Officer of Health can direct the school principal to require unvaccinated students who have been in contact with measles to stay at home. School principals can also consult with Medical Officers of Health and issue the directions themselves.

Immunisation – key messages

- To achieve “herd immunity”, immunisation coverage of 95% is needed to help shield the population from serious diseases, like measles.
- High immunisation rates protect our whole community from the spread of serious diseases.
- When you immunise your child, you're also protecting the people around them, including those who can't be immunised themselves.

Other useful links

- **Ministry of Health Website** <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/measles/protecting-children-who-cant-be-immunised-against-measles>
- **HPA: Immunisation resources** <https://www.hpa.org.nz/programme/immunisation>
- **The National Immunisation Schedule** <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/immunisation/new-zealand-immunisation-schedule>