

# Measles

Community fact sheet – May 2016

## What is measles?

Measles is a very infectious viral illness. People can get unwell with measles seven (7) to 18 days after contact with a person sick with measles.

People with measles can first have a high temperature ( $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), feel very tired with a cough or runny nose or sore red eyes. A blotchy red rash can be seen about three to four days later, starting on the face before spreading down the body. The rash can last between four to seven days.

People with measles can become very unwell and often need to go to hospital.

## How is measles spread?

Measles is spread easily from a person who is sick, to other people. People can catch measles just by being in the same room as someone else with measles.

Measles is spread through breathing in droplets of virus that have been coughed or sneezed into the air by a person sick with measles (infectious person).

## How long can a person spread the illness?

People with measles can spread the illness from just before symptoms begin until four days after the start of the rash.

It can take about 7 to 10 days before someone gets sick with the illness after being in contact with a person with measles, but sometimes it can take up to 18 days.

The rash usually appears 14 days after being in contact with a person sick with measles.

It is important to remember that people can spread the illness even before the rash has appeared.

## Could I get measles?

People who may get measles are:

- anyone who has not received two measles vaccines
- adults between 20 and 49 years of age who have not had any vaccinations or have only had one measles vaccination
- children less than six (6) months old, if the mother is not protected from measles (not vaccinated or had measles in the past)
- children 6-12 months of age (who have not had a measles vaccine)
- people who are immunocompromised (e.g. those with cancer, on chemotherapy or high-dose steroids)

If you have had measles in the past or have had two (2) measles vaccines you are protected.

## What if I don't know about my vaccinations?

Your doctor can do a blood test to see if you have any antibodies (protection) in your blood against measles.

If you were born after 1996 in Australia, your vaccination record is held in the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR), regardless of where you were vaccinated.

## **What can I do to not get measles?**

If you are unsure, check with your doctor about whether you are protected against measles, and if you are not protected, get vaccinated.

The best protection against measles is to have two (2) doses of a measles vaccine (MMR/MMRV)

Your doctor can help you to get the measles vaccine, and certain groups can get access to the vaccine for free, including:

- Refugees or asylum seekers
- Women aged in their 20s to 40s of child bearing age
- People aged under 20 under the Federal Government's current catch-up campaign

The best way to prevent the spread of measles is for people who are sick with measles to get seen by a doctor as soon as they become unwell, and stay away from other people so they do not spread the disease.

## **What do I do if I think I have measles?**

If you think you have measles you should stay away from other people so you do not make them sick.

You must go to your doctor or hospital. Please call before you get to the doctor or hospital and tell them you think you have measles so they can protect other people. You should not sit in a waiting room as you may expose other patients to measles. You may be given a mask or put in a separate room before the doctor sees you.

## **What will my doctor do?**

Your doctor will take some blood and do a swab of your throat to check if you have measles. You will need to stay away from people until you know the results of the test.

## **How is measles treated?**

There is no specific treatment for measles. Rest, drinking fluids, and paracetamol for high temperatures may help some of the symptoms. Remember to stay away from other people so you do not make them sick.

## **Who can I talk to about this?**

If you are unwell, speak with your doctor or call NURSE-ON-CALL (1300 60 60 24) for advice. For other questions you can call 1300 651 160 and speak to a Public Health Officer at the Department of Health and Human Services.

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 1300 651 160, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email [Infectious.diseases@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:Infectious.diseases@dhhs.vic.gov.au)

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