

LOCAL OUTBREAK OF MEASLES: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW AND DO

17 March 2023



Dear Member,

Measles is a highly infectious virus that impacts children more severely, but adults can also be affected. It can lead to serious illness, so here's what you need to know and do to reduce the risk for you and your loved ones.

IN SHORT

- A measles vaccination provides up to 95% protection against the virus. For the few who still contract the infection, symptoms are generally milder and less dangerous than for those who are unvaccinated.
- Most people in our country are already vaccinated against this disease, as a measles vaccination forms part of the national vaccination programme for children, with a first shot usually given at six months of age and another at twelve months of age.

ACTION REQUIRED

- Review your child's vaccination records and confirm that they've been fully vaccinated against measles.
- Even if your child/children are fully vaccinated against measles, the Department of Health will be providing additional booster vaccine doses to children under the age of 15 years to curb the spread.
- If your child/children have not been fully vaccinated against measles, please arrange to have a measles vaccination. This is especially important in the case of young children, who may have missed their routine vaccinations due to COVID-19 disrupting our lives. But it is never too late to vaccinate – children who have not been vaccinated may receive a measles vaccine at any age over six months, and free of charge at primary health services.



What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles symptoms generally become noticeable 10 to 14 days after contact with the virus (known as the incubation period). Initial symptoms typically include fever, coughing, runny nose and watery eyes. A few days later, a measles rash may appear. The rash usually appears as a flat red spot on the face or head, which then spreads downwards to the rest of the body.



What are the complications of measles?

Serious complications may arise from the measles virus. These include diarrhoea and vomiting (that may lead to dehydration), ear infections, respiratory illnesses (e.g. bronchitis, pneumonia, croup), blindness, encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and death. Pregnant women are cautioned to take extra precautions, because measles infection can cause complications or even foetal (baby) death.



How does measles spread?

The virus lives in the mucus of the nose and the throat. It is spread via coughing, sneezing, speaking and/or being in contact with contaminated surfaces and then touching the eyes, nose or mouth. An infected person is infectious from around four days before the appearance of the rash until four days after. A single infected person can infect up to 90% of non-immune people that they come into close contact with. The virus can survive in the air for as long as two hours after the infected person leaves.

Should you or your children present with symptoms, please contact your family or general practitioner as soon as possible for further guidance and/or treatment.

Kind regards,
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