

Quick guide to measles

What is measles?

Measles is a virus that can make adults and children very sick. It is highly infectious and can spread quickly and easily through breathing, sneezing and coughing. If you are not immune to measles, you can catch the disease just by being in the same room as someone who has it.

How serious is measles?

Measles can lead to hospitalisation, serious complications (such as pneumonia and swelling of the brain) or, in rare cases, death. It is especially dangerous for [pregnant women who are not immune, babies and people with weakened immune systems](#).

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles **symptoms include a high fever, runny nose, cough and sore red eyes**. A few days later a **rash starts on the face and neck, and then spreads to the rest of the body**. You can have measles and spread it to others *before* you feel sick or show any symptoms.

What should I do if I think I or a family member has measles?

If you think you have measles, it's important to see a doctor. But **ring before visiting your doctor** to let them know you think you may have measles. When you get to the health centre or hospital, stay in the car and call (or send in whoever is with you) to say you've arrived. This will help avoid spreading the virus in the waiting room. You can also call **Healthline for free health advice: 0800 611 116**. Healthline operates 24/7 and has a translator service available.

How can I protect myself and my family against measles?

The best protection against measles is to be vaccinated with two doses of the measles, mumps, rubella [\(MMR\) vaccine](#). One dose of MMR will protect around 95% of people, while two doses protect around 99% of people. In New Zealand, the MMR vaccine is routinely given to children at 15 months and four years old, but this timing may change during an outbreak. The vaccine is free for everyone born from 1 January 1969. If you were born before then, you are likely to have had the disease as a child and therefore already be immune.

It can take around two weeks for a person to be fully immune after being vaccinated.

What will happen if I do have measles?

If you catch measles, you should stay at home (isolation) for five days after your rash appears. This means you can recover, and you also won't spread the illness. **You can spread measles to others from five days before until five days after your rash appears.**

I'm not sure if I've been vaccinated. What should I do?

Talk to your doctor as the information may be in your medical records. You may also have your own health records e.g. your Plunket or Well Child/Tamariki Ora book. If you can't find your records, vaccination is recommended. If you were born before 1 January 1969, you are likely to have had the disease as a child and therefore be immune.

What do I do if I've only had one of the two MMR vaccine doses?

One dose of measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine protects about 95 per cent of people, and two doses protect about 99 percent. People born between around 1990 and 2005 are less likely to have been fully vaccinated as children. If you're unsure of your vaccination status you can check your Well Child/Tamariki Ora or Plunket book, or contact your doctor. If you can't find your records, vaccination is recommended.

If I've been in contact with someone with measles, how long will it be before I know if I've caught it?

It usually takes 10 to 14 days for someone who has caught measles to start showing symptoms. **If you have been near someone with measles**, and don't know if you're immune, seek medical advice immediately and remain in quarantine at home. Calculate your quarantine period using the [calculator on the ARPHS website](#).

I'm pregnant. Am I at risk?

Most pregnant women will be immune to measles. Non-immune women who become ill with measles while pregnant are at risk of miscarriage, premature labour and low birth weight infants. For more information, see the [People at high risk in a measles outbreak](#) fact sheet.

I'm about to travel to a country that has a measles outbreak. What should I do?

The Ministry of Health advises people travelling overseas to make sure they are fully vaccinated before they go. Measles is regularly brought into the New Zealand through international travel.

If you haven't been vaccinated, be cautious about travelling to any countries where there are serious measles outbreaks. These countries are listed on the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) website (www.cdc.gov/measles/travelers.html).

Children who have not yet been vaccinated are at high risk of the disease. The **Ministry of Health recommends infants aged six months or older travelling to countries with serious measles outbreaks be given MMR vaccine before their travel**. This is an additional vaccination for these infants – they will still need their usual MMR vaccinations at 12-15 months and four years old.

Where can I seek advice or find out more about measles?

Free phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 or visit:

- The Ministry of Health website – www.health.govt.nz
- The Auckland Regional Public Health Service website – www.arphs.health.nz
- The Immunisation Advisory Centre website – www.immune.org.nz (or free phone 0800 466 863)

Last updated June 2019