

4/9/2019

Dear Principals and Directors,

Protect your children/students and staff from measles

Public Health South (PHS) is advising schools and Early Childhood Education Centres that there is currently a measles outbreak in the Southern District.

Since 22nd August, five cases of measles have been confirmed in this region and the disease is now likely to be spreading in the wider community.

The number of cases may seem relatively small in comparison with the population, but one person with measles can infect many others. So far, PHS has contacted many people as part of this outbreak investigation. Once exposed, it takes 7-18 days to develop the symptoms of measles - this is the incubation period.

Measles is a serious and highly infectious viral disease that causes fever, cough, sore red eyes and a rash. Measles can make children and adults very sick and can cause complications in many people, some of which are severe and lifelong.

People with measles can be infectious even before they start feeling unwell. While almost all people will make a complete recovery, it can lead to hospitalisation and in rare cases, death.

Immunisation against measles with two doses of MMR vaccine is the best protection and is free for all eligible people. With schools being back in session, we need your help to prevent further transmission of the measles virus.

Recommendations

- Please check to see that your school immunisation register (if you have one) is up to date.
- Encourage unimmunised children/students to get immunised as soon as possible as per the Immunisation Schedule (MMR at 15 months and 4 years old).
- Encourage staff to check their immune status and get immunised if necessary.
- Keep any children/students or staff who are unwell away from school.
- Public Health South will be in touch with you if there is a confirmed case of measles in your school community – please await our contact and support to help guide messaging to your community.
- If your school is planning on visiting Queenstown and/or going skiing in the near future, please ensure your students and parents are protected. Children/parents who are unvaccinated should not travel.

Our recommendations will help protect people who are at risk, including children who are too young to be immunised, pregnant women who are not immunised, and people with a compromised immune system (such as those receiving treatment for cancer).

Attached is a letter for parents/guardians to send out and a Q & A fact sheet for staff and parents.

We appreciate your help in controlling this measles outbreak. For more information relating to measles, please refer to the:

- Ministry of Health's website
<https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/measles>

Kind regards,

Dr Susan Jack

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH

Designated by Director General of Health under Section 7 (A) of the Health Act 1956.

Letter to parents

<Insert school or centre letterhead>

<insert date>

Dear Parent/Caregiver

<Insert school name here> has been advised that since 22nd August, five people have been confirmed with measles in the Southern region and the disease is now likely to be spreading in the wider community.

The number of cases may seem relatively small in comparison with the population, but one person with measles can infect many others.

PHS advises that immunisation is the best protection against measles.

Immunisation is safe, effective and free.

Measles is serious and highly infectious viral disease that causes fever, cough, sore red eyes and a rash. It can make people very sick. People with measles can be infectious even before they start feeling unwell. While almost all people will make a complete recovery, it can lead to hospitalisation and in rare cases, death.

Parents/guardians need to find out whether their children are protected against measles.

Regarding your child's immunisation status:

- **If your child has not received their measles immunisation (MMR vaccine)** as per the Immunisation Schedule (1st MMR at 15 months and 2nd MMR at four years), call your GP as soon as possible. Arrange a time to immunise your child as it is never too late.
- **Infants and children who are not travelling to Auckland** or overseas to a country with a measles outbreak are recommended to get their MMR vaccinations as per the Immunisation Schedule at 15 months and 4 years.
- **Infants aged 6 to 11 months who are travelling to Auckland** or overseas to a country with a measles outbreak, can have their first MMR vaccination (MMR0) after consulting with their GP, however they will still need to have the MMR vaccinations at 15 months and four years as per the Immunisation Schedule.
- **Infants aged 12 to 14 months who are travelling to Auckland** or overseas to a country with a measles outbreak, should receive all four 15 month vaccinations (MMR, varicella, Hib and PCV10) at least two weeks before travelling to allow immunity against measles to develop.
- **If your child has received only one measles immunisation (i.e. one MMR vaccination)**, call your GP as soon as possible to see if you need to arrange a time to immunise your child with their second MMR. Two measles immunisations provide better protection than one.
- **If your child has received two measles immunisations, or they have definitely had doctor-diagnosed measles infection in the past**, they are considered protected. Over 99% of people who are fully immunised are protected from measles.
- **If you are not sure of your child's immunisation records**, look in your child's plunket book or check with your GP.

- **If your child is not immune or you choose not to immunise your child**, they are not protected from measles. If they come into contact with someone with measles, they will likely have to be excluded from school or ECEC for up to 14 days.

Signs of measles

It usually takes 10 to 14 days for someone who has caught measles to start showing symptoms.

If your child develops a high fever, runny nose, cough, sore red eyes, or a rash see a doctor (call ahead to alert your doctor about the possibility of measles before visiting and take this letter along).

If your child has a weakened immune system (e.g. if they have an inherited immune problem or are receiving chemotherapy for cancer), please contact your doctor to discuss further.

If this occurs: Call your GP or Healthline (0800 611 116) as soon as possible for advice. Your GP will advise the safest time for your child to return to school. If your GP suspects measles, they will arrange for testing and Public Health South will be in contact to offer support and any follow up regarding contact tracing.

For more information about measles, contact Healthline on 0800 611 116 or visit <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/measles>

Kind regards

<insert name>

<insert title here>

Measles Information for staff and parents

What are the symptoms?

The signs of measles are a cough, high fever, runny nose and sore red eyes. A few days later, a rash begins on the head and spreads across the body.

How do I know if I'm immune to measles?

To know that you are 99% immune to measles one or more of the following should apply to you:

1. You have had two measles vaccines (MMR). You need to check your vaccination records in your Well Child (Plunket book) or your family doctor may have records. Please show your principal your vaccination record.
2. OR you have been diagnosed with measles in the past, or have a blood test proving measles immunity
3. OR you were born before 1969 as you are likely to have had measles as a child.

You are almost certainly protected from measles if one of the above applies and will not need to be isolated if you come into contact with someone with measles.

I've only had one MMR – do I have to get another vaccination?

To ensure you are 99% protected against measles, it is important to have a second MMR as this vaccine also protects against mumps and rubella. Whilst one MMR does offer 95% of people immunity, it still provides gaps in our community coverage against measles, which puts vulnerable people like new born babies and people with compromised immune systems (e.g. having cancer treatment) at high risk.

Why do I (or my child) have to stay at home in isolation?

If you are developing measles, staying home stops it spreading to others and making them unwell.

What does isolation mean?

It means staying home away from others. Do not go to work, school, group or social activities, sports, or public places like movie theatres, shopping malls, supermarkets and other food markets. Do not use public transport or visit friends or family. Avoid being in the same room as people who are not immune to measles.

What if I or my child feel worse or have symptoms, and need to go to a doctor again?

If you need to see a doctor, **phone** the medical centre or after-hours clinic **before** going there and tell them you (or your child) may have measles. When you arrive, you must be isolated and not sit in the waiting room.

My child hasn't been in the same classroom as a measles case. Are they still at risk?

If your child has been in the same class, room or space as the person with measles while they were infectious, then your child will have been exposed. If your child is not in the same class, even though they may have been in the same classroom afterwards or in the same hall or playground, the risk is much lower. The school is not asking you to keep your child at home, but do watch for symptoms, particularly if they are not vaccinated. We also ask you to check that they are vaccinated.

I don't have any proof that I have been vaccinated– what do I do?

If you have been exposed to measles but are younger than 50 years, and if your doctor cannot confirm you have been vaccinated or had measles, you may be asked to stay home for the isolation period. Please get vaccinated when you are out of isolation.

If my child has been exposed to measles, do I have to tell others?

You do not need to tell anyone else that your child may be developing measles and is in isolation, unless your child is confirmed as having the virus. Only then will you need to inform the school, and then any family and social contacts.

I'm pregnant or have a weak immune system – am I at risk?

Pregnant women who haven't been vaccinated, and anyone with a weakened immune system, are at greater risk of measles complications. They or their caregiver should ask their doctor or lead maternity carer for advice.