



30 April 2019

# Measles Fact Sheet

- Measles is a highly infectious viral illness spread by contact with respiratory secretions through coughing and sneezing
- Symptoms of measles include:
  - A respiratory type of illness with dry cough, runny nose, headache
  - Temperature over 38.5 C and feeling very unwell
  - A red blotchy rash starts on day 4-5 of the illness usually on the face and moves to the chest and arms.
- People are infectious from five days before the onset of the rash to five days after the rash starts.
- **Infected persons should stay in isolation – staying home from school or work – during this time.**
- The best protection from measles is to have two MMR vaccinations. MMR is available from your general practice and is free to eligible persons.
- People are considered immune if they have received two doses of MMR vaccine, have had a measles illness previously, or were born before 1969.
- Anyone believing they have been exposed to measles or exhibiting symptoms should not go to the ED or after hours' clinic or general practitioner. Instead call Healthline free on 0800 611 116 for advice and information from a trusted registered nurse, anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## How you get it

Measles virus is highly contagious. It is spread through the air by infected droplets or by direct contact with secretions from the nose or throat of infected persons, for example by touching contaminated items or surfaces. It can survive for up to two hours in the air. A person with measles is most contagious from when symptoms start until three to four days after the rash appears.

Anyone who has not received at least one dose of a measles-containing vaccine or who has not already had the disease is at risk of catching measles.

## Symptoms and treatment

It usually takes 10-12 days from exposure to the first symptom. The illness begins with fever, cough, runny nose and conjunctivitis (inflammation in the eyes), which lasts for 2-4 days. It may be possible to see small white spots (Koplik spots) inside the mouth. A rash appears 2-4 days after the first symptoms, beginning at the hairline and gradually spreading down the body to the arms and legs. The rash lasts for up to one week.

There is no specific antiviral treatment for measles. Supportive care including rest, good nutrition, vitamin A supplements, painkillers and adequate fluid intake, including hospital care when needed, can help to manage severe complications.

Please see the Ministry of Health website for more information on measles at:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/measles>

***Vaccinate Now, Don't Delay!***

If you have any queries, please contact the on-call Public Health Nurse on 0800 600 720.

**Dr Virginia McLaughlin**  
MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH (Northland)