

Measles Fact Sheet

What is measles?

Measles is a highly infectious illness caused by a virus. It may cause serious complications. In the past, measles was very common, but immunisation has now made it rare in Tasmania.

What are the symptoms?

The first symptoms are fever, tiredness, cough, runny nose, and sore red eyes. A red blotchy rash appears about four days later. The rash usually starts on the face then spreads down to the body. The rash may last for up to a week.

People usually feel and look unwell.

A complication, such as diarrhoea, ear infections or lung infection, will occur in approximately one in three people with measles.

About one in every 1 000 people with measles develops swelling of the brain (encephalitis).

How is it spread?

Measles is one of the most easily spread infections. It is spread when someone coughs or sneezes. You can get infected just by being in the same room as someone with measles.

People can spread measles from just before their symptoms begin until four days after their rash first appears.

The time between a person coming in contact with the measles virus, to first becoming sick is usually about 10 days.

Who is at risk?

Anyone not immune is at risk of catching measles. A person is likely to be immune if they were born before 1966 or if they have had two doses of measles containing vaccine.

How is it diagnosed?

If a doctor thinks you may have measles, samples from the nose, throat, blood or urine can be collected.

Confirming the diagnosis is important to prevent the spread of disease to others.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Care involves rest, fluids and observation for complications. People unwell may require treatment in hospital.

How is it prevented?

While someone is infectious with measles it is important they stay at home to prevent passing it to other people.

The best protection against measles is immunisation.

Two doses of measles-containing vaccine, given at least four weeks apart is required.

The measles vaccine also protects against mumps and rubella and is often called MMR (measles, mumps and rubella).

The MMRV vaccine also protects against chickenpox (varicella).

MMR vaccine is safe and effective, and has been used worldwide for many years.

It is safe to have even if you have had a measles infection or a measles vaccine before.

Who should get immunised?

Measles-containing vaccine is routinely recommended for all children at 12 months and 18 months of age.

These two doses of measles-containing vaccine protect against measles in almost all those who receive vaccine.

Children as young as six months of age can receive MMR vaccine in certain circumstances including travel to highly endemic areas and during outbreaks.

If an infant receives MMR vaccine at or before 11 months of age, they still need to receive the two recommended vaccine doses at 12 and 18 months of age.

Under a state-funded program, measles vaccine is free for:

- Tasmanians born during or after 1966 who do not have documented evidence of receiving two measles-containing vaccines or serological (blood test) evidence of immunity.
- Infants aged six to 12 months travelling overseas.

Most people born before 1966 are immune to measles because they were infected as children.

What should I do if I've had contact with someone who has measles?

If you've been in contact with someone with measles and you are not immune to measles (have not been immunised or have not had a measles infection), there are different treatment options.

Speak to your doctor about your options.

Depending on your situation, these may include receiving the MMR vaccine or receiving an injection called normal human immunoglobulin.

It is also a good idea not to be around anyone who may be at risk of catching measles from you until 18 days after you had contact with the person diagnosed with measles.

What should I do if I have measles?

If you or your child has symptoms of measles you should seek medical care as soon as possible.

You should phone ahead to the doctor's surgery or hospital to let them know you may have measles.

This will allow them to plan your visit by supplying you with a mask and isolating you to prevent the infection spreading to staff or other patients.

If you have measles you should stay away from public places such as work, school, childcare and shopping centres, and not use public transport until cleared by a doctor or public health professional.

Call the Public Health Hotline – Tasmania on **1800 671 738** to speak to a clinical nurse consultant.

24 December 2019