

MEDIA RELEASE

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Measles outbreak reaches Nelson Tasman region

The Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service has confirmed a case of measles that is likely to be connected to four other cases notified in the South Island.

Dr Stephen Bridgman, Public Health Medicine Specialist and Clinical Director, says that an adult male with the disease attended a Tasman medical centre. The centre is currently contacting all people who may have been exposed to measles that day, and will offer vaccination to people at risk.

The immunisation status of the person with the disease is under investigation, but three of four other people in the South Island (one in Queenstown, one in Wanaka and two in Christchurch) with measles have been confirmed as being unvaccinated.

Public Health Service staff have contacted general practices and pharmacies advising vigilance and for the appropriate infection control procedures to be put in place. Nelson Marlborough Health is part of a South Island regional response to the outbreak.

Dr Bridgman says that measles is highly infectious to unvaccinated people.

“Measles can spread to others in a waiting room. This is why it is important, if you have measles symptoms, to call your GP or Healthline first before going to your doctor or medical centre.

“Measles is a very serious illness, with more than 30 deaths in Europe last year. This is why vaccination is so important – we need a 95% vaccination rate in our region to prevent outbreaks.”

Dr Bridgman says that people born before 1969, and people who have had two doses of the MMR vaccine are almost-certainly immune to measles. People who have definitely had measles in the past are also immune.

“But, if in doubt, check with your doctor to see if you have had the recommended number of MMR vaccines.”

More about measles

- Measles is a notifiable disease
- It is a highly infectious viral illness spread by contact with respiratory secretions through coughing and sneezing. Unimmunised people exposed to measles first develop a respiratory type of illness.
- Measles starts with a fever (temperature over 38.5 C) and usually a cough or runny nose, and perhaps sore, red eyes before the rash appears on day 4-5.
- People are infectious from five days before the onset of the rash to five days after the rash starts and should stay in isolation during this time.

More information about measles is available at <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/measles>.

Anyone with these symptoms or who believes they may have been exposed, can contact Healthline 0800 611 116 (free and 24 hours) for additional advice.

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