

MEDIA RELEASE

22 October 2019

Measles outbreak reaches Marlborough

The Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service has confirmed a case of measles that is connected to the current Auckland outbreak.

Until this point, the Nelson Marlborough region was one of only four DHB region to hold on to its measles-free status during the current outbreak. The last case of measles in Marlborough was in November 2018 and the last case in Nelson in April 2018.

Medical Officer of Health Dr Andrew Lindsay says that the person has been in quarantine (home-based isolation) since the start of their infectious period.

“Regional Public Health (Wellington) alerted the Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service of this person who had been in contact with a confirmed case of measles while in Wellington. The young adult has followed all Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service advice and has been in isolation to protect other people before he became unwell. Being in isolation during the infectious period has drastically helped reduce the spread of this serious disease,” Dr Lindsay says.

“We can’t emphasize enough the importance of letting your GP know if you’ve been in contact with someone with measles. This is an incredibly infectious disease – the virus can spread through the air. If we are to stop measles spreading freely around our community we must protect by vaccination and isolate all confirmed cases and suspected cases as soon as possible.”

One of the roles of the Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service during outbreaks is active case management and contact tracing. When the Public Health Service tracks people who have had contact with a suspect case, and they find people who are susceptible to measles (because they are not immune) who were exposed to the infection, they are advised to stay home for a set period of time.

There are currently further two people in quarantine with suspected measles, both of whom are in Nelson and one of whom is a pre-schooler. At this stage measles is suspected but not confirmed.

Measles symptoms and what to do if you think you may have measles

Symptoms include a fever, runny nose, sore red eyes and cough, followed a few days later by a rash usually starting on the face before moving down the body.

If you think you or someone in your family may have measles, please stay at home and phone your doctor to alert them of your symptoms and allow them to assess you safely – without infecting other people.

“Measles can spread to others in a waiting room very quickly. This is why it is important, if you have measles symptoms, to phone quickly for advice before visiting a waiting room. Call your GP clinic, or Healthline on 0800 611 116 for advice.

“You should also stay home. This means staying away from work, school, other people’s homes and all public places to help prevent putting other people at risk. This also applies if you or a family member aren’t fully immunised and may have been in contact with someone with measles.”

“It is also important to let your GP practice know about symptoms, via the phone, because while someone with measles symptoms might not need medical attention – the Public Health Service needs to know of all suspect cases, via a GP,” Dr Lindsay says.

MMR vaccine availability

- Parents and caregivers are urged to ensure their children’s measles (MMR) vaccine is up to date; children require MMR vaccinations at 15 months and 4 years to be immune. Free immunisation for these age groups is available from a GP or practice nurse.
- On 18 October the Government announced the extended availability of the vaccine to all children under 15 who have not had a single dose of MMR.
- The MMR vaccine is free for everyone born from 1 January 1969 onwards who hasn't already had two recorded doses; ask to go on the waiting list for vaccination if you are not in the priority group (children under then age of 15).
- If you are planning to take unvaccinated children younger than 5 to Auckland or counties with current measles outbreaks, it’s recommended that they be immunised no less than two weeks before travel. A GP can advise whether vaccination is appropriate for babies younger than 12 months old.

Hospital preparedness

Contingency planning has been underway at both Nelson and Wairau hospitals since the start of the outbreak. This includes the fine-tuning of existing measles infection control procedures and treatment pathways and stock-taking of protective clothing and equipment.

The infection prevention team has also been busy checking and testing the measles immunity status of those staff who work with vulnerable patients. More than 600 staff who work with patients in paediatrics, oncology, intensive care, emergency department and maternity wards are known to be fully immune from measles.

For more information:

For national (excluding Auckland) MMR vaccination advice: <http://www.immune.org.nz/hot-topic/measles-overseas-and-new-zealand>

Or phone: 0800 IMMUNE (466 863)

For the current outbreak situation: www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/measles/2019-measles-outbreak-information

For general information about measles: <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/m/measles/>

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Contact:

Stephanie Gray, Communications Manager, Nelson Marlborough Health
03 546 1824 / 027 4466 799 / stephanie.gray@nmdhb.govt.nz