

MEDIA REPOSE

30 August 2019

A call to action: Let's keep measles out of the Top of the South

While increasing numbers of people are hospitalised with measles in Auckland, and the more cases are confirmed in South Island cities, the disease has not yet been confirmed in any Nelson, Tasman or Marlborough residents.

Let's keep it that way, says Dr Andrew Lindsay, Medical Officer of Health with the Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service.

"This is the biggest outbreak in more than 20 years, with more than 800 cases to date. This is a serious, life-threatening disease that is very, very difficult to contain – as we're seeing in Auckland."

"Measles 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.

"Immunisation is your best protection against measles and the MMR vaccine is available free for children, and people under the age of 50 who are not fully immunised. "

Parents should check their children's Well Child immunisation record (the 'Plunket book') to see if their child is immunised. If in doubt, they should call their GP or practice nurse to check their immunisation status.

"Children and adults need to have had two doses of the MMR vaccine to be fully immunised, but one dose of MMR provides 95% protection. So if you have delayed or declined your child's vaccination please book them in for that important first dose," Dr Lindsay says.

"Some parents may perceive measles to be a rare, or low-risk illness. The current outbreaks in New Zealand, as well as frequent outbreaks overseas, prove this to be a misconception.

"Measles is a serious, life-threatening disease. It is important that we all do our part to protect ourselves and those around us. There are babies too young for vaccination and others with conditions where vaccination is not possible. The rest of the community has a responsibility to protect these vulnerable people, as well as themselves," Dr Lindsay says.

"The MMR vaccine is safe and effective. If you have any questions about the vaccine, contact your GP, practice nurse or the Immunisation Advisory Centre on 0800 IMMUNE. "

Get immunised before travelling to Auckland

The MMR vaccine is usually given to children at 15 months of age with a booster shot at 4 years.

People planning to travel to Auckland or overseas with children under 15 months should ask their healthcare provider about earlier vaccination.

Adults born before 1969 are generally considered to be immune, but everyone else should ensure they are up to date with their MMR immunisation. Contact your doctor to book you or your child's MMR immunisation, or to check to see if you are immune to measles.

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.”

How can you tell if you are immune?

- You are considered immune if you were born before 1969 or you've received two doses of the MMR vaccine after the age of one. If you have definitely had measles in the past you are also considered to be immune.
- Under the New Zealand Immunisation Schedule, children are eligible for free MMR vaccine when they are 15 months old, and again at 4 years old. If they have had both vaccines, they are considered immune. One dose (the first) provides 95% protection.
- The MMR vaccine is free for all age groups (ie, including adults) in New Zealand.

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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