

Preschools and kindergartens – measles information for newsletters/email from the Canterbury District Health Board

March 6 2019

Since 26 February 2019, the number of cases in the latest Canterbury measles outbreak has been steadily climbing and as at 5 March we had ten confirmed cases. Two are children of preschool age, with more likely to be confirmed over the next days and weeks. Some are children who have yet to complete their MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccinations, but four are adults aged between 27 and 50 who have had only one measles vaccination, which was standard practice between 1969 and 1990. Cases have now spread throughout Christchurch.

Measles is a serious and highly contagious viral disease where up to 30 percent of those who catch it will develop complications – usually children under 5 and adults over the age of 20. Measles during pregnancy increases the risk of miscarriage, premature labour and low birth-weight in babies. Measles is spread through droplets in the air and through contact, so that anyone unprotected who has been in the same room as someone with measles will likely get it.

The surest protection is for people to have had both of their MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccinations, scheduled to be given to children at 15 months and at four years. Children older than four who are up to date with their immunisations are protected. People vaccinated between 1969 and 1990 will have had a less effective vaccine and we recommend they contact their GP team to arrange to have a booster MMR. An extra vaccination will not cause any harm. People born before 1969 will have been exposed to measles and will be immune.

Babies with a mother who is immune will have some protection if they are currently being breastfed. For children who are too young to have had both MMR's or who cannot for other reasons, the best way to protect them is to ensure everyone around them has been vaccinated – if you can't get it, you can't pass it on.

- We recommend that all children in Canterbury should bring forward their first MMR vaccination to 12 months, instead of the usual 15 months.
- We also recommend that the second dose of MMR is given one month after the first month instead of waiting until four years old.

Measles symptoms include:

- o A respiratory type of illness with dry cough, runny nose, headache
- o Temperature over 38.5 C and feeling very unwell
- o A red blotchy rash starts on day 4-5 of the illness usually on the face and moves to the chest and arms.

More information about measles is available at <http://www.immune.org.nz>

If you think a child at your school has measles, keep them away from other children until they can be collected and taken home. If they are already sick they should stay home for at least five days after symptoms such as a rash appeared. Once measles has been in your school, parents of any children who are not fully immune (2 doses of MMR) are advised to keep them home for 14 days from the likely date of exposure.