

Primary school and above – measles information for school 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 have had ten confirmed cases, 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. As long as children of school age are up-to-date with their vaccinations they should be protected against measles. People vaccinated between 1969 and 1990 should contact their GP team who will provide a booster vaccination. People born before 1969 will have been exposed to measles and will be immune.

Family members who aren't sure if they have been immunised with two doses of MMR vaccine should talk to their GP team who will be able to provide a vaccination if they need it. An extra vaccination will not cause any harm.

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.