

Measles: a quick guide Q&A

With measles outbreaks happening all over the world, including here in New Zealand, now's a good time to learn more about the disease - and make sure you're protected.

Check out the questions and answers below to find out more.

Is measles a current concern?

Yes. There are currently measles outbreaks all over the world, including here in New Zealand. There have been four confirmed cases in Auckland and are currently around 30 cases in Canterbury.

How serious is measles?

Measles is a serious illness that affects both children and adults. One in 10 people with measles need hospital treatment and the most serious cases can result in deafness or swelling of the brain.

Measles is one of the most infectious airborne diseases. The virus spreads easily from person to person through the air, via breathing, coughing and sneezing. It is spread both through contact and through droplets in the air, so that anyone unimmunised who has been in the same room as someone with measles will likely get it.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles symptoms include a high fever, runny nose, cough and sore red eyes, followed by a rash starting behind the ears and spreading to the body a few days later.

If you think you have the measles, it's important to call before visiting your doctor to avoid spreading the virus in the waiting room. If you catch measles you're infectious from 5 days before and until 5 days after the rash appears.

Anyone with measles needs to be isolated from the time they become ill until 5 days after the rash has appeared. It is extremely important to stay in isolation if you're asked to do so, to protect vulnerable people including babies, pregnant women, cancer patients and others who are unable to be immunised.

How can I protect myself and my family against measles?

The best way to prevent measles is to be immunised on time, with two free MMR vaccinations for all children at 15 months and four years. One dose of MMR vaccine is 95% effective against measles and two doses are 99% effective. If you have had one vaccine and are seeking a second, please be patient so that those who have had no vaccinations can be immunised first. Please wait a couple of weeks before calling your GP practice or medical centre to arrange your second vaccination.

I don't know whether I've been immunised or not. What should I do?

If you are unsure whether you're immune and/or how many vaccine doses you have had, talk to your

doctor as the information may be in your medical records. You may also have your own health records e.g. your Plunket or Well Child/Tamariki Ora book. For more information, see below.

What do I do if I haven't been immunised against measles?

If you are not immunised, you should make an appointment with your medical practice to get the MMR vaccine.

What do I do if I've only had one of the two MMR vaccine doses?

One dose of MMR vaccine is 95% effective against measles and two doses are 99% effective. If you have had one vaccine and are seeking a second, please be patient so that those who have had no vaccinations can be immunised first. Please wait a couple of weeks before calling your GP practice or medical centre to arrange your second vaccination. If you have had a single dose of measles vaccine, your second dose is free of charge, but practice nurse fees may apply.

If I've been in contact with someone with measles, how long will it be before I know if I've caught it?

It usually takes 10 to 14 days for someone who has caught measles to start showing symptoms.

I have some symptoms of measles, should I come to work?

Anyone who is sick should stay away from work, school, large gatherings or 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.

By isolating yourself you will help protect vulnerable people including babies, pregnant women, cancer patients and others who are unable to be immunised and for whom the impact of the disease can be devastating.

What does MMR stand for?

MMR stands for measles, mumps and rubella as the MMR provides protect against all three of these illnesses.

How long does it take for the vaccination to work?

It can take around two weeks for a person to be fully immune after a vaccination.

I have a baby who isn't immunised. What should I do?

Children who have not yet been immunised are at greatest risk of the disease. It's important they have their vaccines on time at 15 months and four years. If you are travelling overseas, please also see the *Travel* advice below.

Babies whose mothers are immune will have some protection if they are currently being breastfed.

For children who are too young to have had the measles vaccine it is advisable that they avoid group events, and that others in their household are vaccinated.

My pre-schooler isn't immunised. What should I do?

Children who have not yet been immunised are at greatest risk of the disease so it's important they have their vaccines on time. Children aged between 15 months and 4 years (outside of Canterbury where there is a measles outbreak) should receive their normal MMR vaccinations at 15 months and four years old. The vaccine is free for infants and children.

I'm pregnant. Am I at risk?

Non-immunised women who become ill with measles while pregnant risk miscarriage, premature labour and low birth weight infants. If you're pregnant and think you have measles, or have come in contact with someone with measles, you must call your general practice or lead maternity carer as soon as possible.

- If you were not immunised against measles before becoming pregnant, you should **not** receive the MMR vaccine during pregnancy.
- If you are of child bearing age you should avoid pregnancy for one month after having a dose of the MMR vaccine.
- If you are breastfeeding (and not pregnant) you can receive the MMR vaccine safely.
- If you were immunised against measles prior to becoming pregnant you are almost certainly protected.

What is the situation for teenagers and adults younger than 29?

Many teenagers and young adults have missed one or both MMR vaccines and may be unaware that they are not immune. People who aren't sure whether they are up to date with all their scheduled immunisations are being advised to check their Well Child Tamariki Ora health book or contact their general practice.

One dose of MMR vaccine is 95% effective against measles and two doses are 99% effective. If you have had one vaccine and are seeking a second, please be patient so that those who have had no vaccinations can be immunised first. Please wait a couple of weeks before calling your GP practice or medical centre to arrange your second vaccination.

I'm aged between 29 and 50. Does that mean I've had one dose of measles vaccine?

If you're aged between 29 and 50 you're likely to have received one dose of measles vaccine, which also means you're likely to be immune. In addition, some people in this age group may have been infected with measles as it was still circulating in the community at the time – if you have had the disease and recovered, you are almost always immune.

One dose of MMR vaccine is 95% effective against measles and two doses are 99% effective. If you have had one vaccine and are seeking a second, please be patient so that those who have had no vaccinations can be immunised first. Please wait a couple of weeks before calling your GP practice or medical centre to arrange your second vaccination.

Visit www.arphs.govt.nz or call 09 623 4600

I was born before 1969 when there was no measles vaccine available. Am I at risk?

Before 1969, there was no national vaccination campaign against measles in New Zealand and almost everyone caught the disease as children as it is so infectious. Those who have recovered from the disease are almost always immune, so it is very rare to see any measles in people born in New Zealand before 1969. Measles vaccine was available in some other countries before 1969 so some adults who were born overseas may have received a measles vaccine. It is not therefore generally recommended that people over 50 years be vaccinated with MMR vaccine. People with concerns about whether they are immune are being asked to talk to their general practice or contact the Immunisation Advisory Centre ([0800 IMMUNE](tel:0800-IMMUNE)).

I'm about to travel to a country that has a measles outbreak. What should I do?

The Ministry of Health is advising people travelling overseas to make sure they are fully immunised against measles before they go. Measles is regularly brought into the New Zealand through international travel. There are currently significant measles outbreaks overseas, including in the Philippines and in some European countries. Children who have not yet been immunised are at greatest risk of the disease. The Ministry of Health recommends that:

- Infants aged 6–15 months travelling to countries with serious measles outbreaks be given MMR vaccine before their travel. This is an additional vaccination for those infants – they will still need their usual MMR vaccinations at 15 months and four years old.

If you haven't been immunised, you should be cautious about travelling to any countries where there are serious measles outbreaks. An up-to-date list of countries with a measles outbreak can be found on the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website](https://www.cdc.gov/measles/travelers.html) (<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/travelers.html>)

Are there sufficient supplies of MMR vaccine?

Currently there is enough vaccine in New Zealand to meet the additional demands in Canterbury and maintain New Zealand's normal MMR vaccination schedule. One dose of MMR vaccine is 95% effective against measles and two doses are 99% effective. If you have had one vaccine and are seeking a second, please be patient so that those who have had no vaccinations can be immunised first. Please wait a couple of weeks before calling your GP practice or medical centre to arrange your second vaccination.

Where can I seek advice or find out more about measles?

For more information or advice on measles, please call Healthline on 0800 611 116 or visit the [measles section of this website](#) or the [Ministry of Health website](#).

For information on the measles outbreak in Canterbury, visit the [Canterbury DHB website](#).