

# Quick guide to measles

## What is measles?

Measles is a virus that can make adults and children very sick. It is highly infectious and can spread quickly and easily through breathing, sneezing and coughing. If you are not immune to measles, you can catch the disease just by being in the same room as someone who has it.

## How serious is measles?

Measles can lead to hospitalisation, serious complications (such as pneumonia and swelling of the brain) or, in rare cases, death. It is especially dangerous for [pregnant women, babies and people with weakened immune systems](#).

## What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles **symptoms include a high fever, runny nose, cough and sore red eyes**. A few days later a **rash starts on the face and neck, and then spreads to the rest of the body**. You can have measles and spread it to others *before* you feel sick or show any symptoms.

## What should I do if I think I or a family member has measles?

If you think you have measles, it's important to immediately seek medical advice. But **ring before visiting your doctor** to let them know you think you may have measles. When you get to the health centre or hospital, stay in the car and call (or send in whoever is with you) to say you've arrived. This will help avoid spreading the virus in the waiting room. You can also call **Healthline for free health advice: 0800 611 116**. Healthline operates 24/7 and has a translator service available.

## How can I protect myself and my family against measles?

The best protection against measles is to be vaccinated with two doses of the measles, mumps, rubella [\(MMR\) vaccine](#). One dose of MMR will protect around 95% of people, while two doses protect around 99% of people. In New Zealand, the MMR vaccine is routinely given to children at 15 months and four years old.

It's important to be up to date with your measles vaccination, even if you're an adult. Being vaccinated not only protects you and your family, but others in your community. The vaccine is free for everyone born from 1 January 1969. If you were born before then, you are likely to have had the disease as a child and therefore already be immune.

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

## What will happen if I do have measles?

**[If you catch measles](#), you will be infectious from five days before until five days after the rash appears.** You must seek medical advice and stay **in isolation, away from others, to recover and prevent spreading the disease**. Staying in isolation protects people at high risk of the disease, including babies, pregnant women, cancer patients and others who have weak immune systems or are unable to be vaccinated.

## I'm an adult and not sure if I've been vaccinated. What should I do?

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. If you can't find your records, vaccination is recommended. If you were born before 1 January 1969, you are likely to have had the disease as a child and therefore be immune.

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

One dose of measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine protects about 95 percent of people, and two doses protect about 99 percent. People aged 13-29 are less likely to have been fully vaccinated as children. If you're unsure of your vaccination status you can check your Well Child Tamariki Ora or Plunket book, or contact your doctor. If you can't find your records, vaccination is recommended.

## 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. [If you have been near someone with measles](#), and don't know if you're immune, seek medical advice immediately and remain in quarantine at home. Read more about what quarantine is and what to do in our [What is quarantine](#) fact sheet.

## I'm pregnant. Am I at risk?

Non-immune women who become ill with measles while pregnant are at risk of 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 immediately.

- If you were not vaccinated 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 vaccinated against measles before becoming pregnant you are almost certainly protected. Your doctor or lead maternity carer can arrange a blood test to confirm whether you are 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 vaccinated against measles before they go. Measles is regularly brought into the New Zealand through international travel.

If you haven't been vaccinated, 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](http://www.cdc.gov/measles/travelers.html) website ([www.cdc.gov/measles/travelers.html](http://www.cdc.gov/measles/travelers.html))

Children who have not yet been vaccinated are at high 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 these infants – they will still need their usual MMR vaccinations at 15 months and four years old.

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

**Free phone Healthline on 0800 611 116** or visit:

- The Ministry of Health website – [www.health.govt.nz](http://www.health.govt.nz)
- The Auckland Regional Public Health Service website – [www.arphs.health.nz](http://www.arphs.health.nz)
- The Immunisation Advisory Centre website – [www.immune.org.nz](http://www.immune.org.nz) (or free phone 0800 466 863)

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