

Health Professional Advisory: For staff, parents and pupils at early childcare and primary schools

Date: 25 March 2019

Subject: Measles advisory

With the ongoing measles outbreak in Canterbury, and with further cases in Auckland, now is the time to make sure your child is immunised against measles. Two doses of the MMR vaccine are needed for maximum protection. If you are not sure if your child is fully immunised, check in your Well Child book, or talk to the Practice Nurse at your usual General Practice.

MMR vaccine is recommended at 15 months and again at 4 years of age. If your child has not received these vaccinations they are at higher risk of contracting measles. Unimmunised children who are even only exposed to measles could face up to two weeks away from an Early Child Education Centre or school while they wait to see if measles develops, causing enormous disruption in families.

Measles is on the rise in NZ and overseas making it even more important to vaccinate your children. Those who have previously declined vaccination of their babies and children are strongly urged to reconsider their choice.

Vaccination is the only sure way of preventing serious and in some cases life threatening illnesses such as measles.

People who are regarded as **NOT** immune to measles are:

- People younger than 50 years old (born after 01 January 1969) who have not had two doses of the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine or have **not** had a laboratory confirmed positive measles result.
- Children over four years old who have not received their second dose of MMR
- Infants under the age of 15 months who have not received their first routine dose of MMR vaccine. They are susceptible and rely on everyone else to be immune so that measles does not spread to them

What is measles?

- Measles is a highly infectious viral disease that can be serious.
- It is spread from person to person through the air by breathing, sneezing or coughing. Just being in the same room as someone with measles can lead to infection if you are not

immune.

- The first symptoms of measles are a fever, and one or more of: a runny nose; cough and sore, red eyes. After a few days a red blotchy rash comes on and lasts up to one week. The rash usually starts on the face and spreads to the rest of the body. Measles can be very serious.

What should you do?

- Ensure you are up to date with your immunisations.
- Phone your GP or Practice Nurse if you are unsure whether you are fully immunised
- If you are not immune, it is important to be aware of the symptoms of measles. The early symptoms of measles are fever, runny nose, sore red eyes and cough. See the Ministry of Health website www.health.govt.nz
- Phone your GP or Healthline **0800 611 116** if you are worried about symptoms of possible measles

It is important to call first because measles is highly infectious, and people with measles can infect others in the waiting room

Further information you may find useful:

1. Information about measles symptoms and prevention is available on the Ministry of Health website: <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/measles>
2. Information about the MMR vaccine is available on the Immunisation Advisory Centre's website: <http://www.immune.org.nz/hot-topic/measles-overseas-and-new-zealand>
3. Information about the National Immunisation Schedule is available on the Ministry of Health website: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/immunisation/new-zealand-immunisation-schedule>

Dr Andrew Lindsay

Medical Officer of Health

Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service