

Canterbury Measles Outbreak – Information for mothers and babies

Measles is spreading in Canterbury. It is a highly infectious virus that can be life threatening. Complications occur in about one in three people, and for them measles can be serious or even fatal.

What are the symptoms?

Measles symptoms are a:

1. cough or runny nose or conjunctivitis **AND**
2. fever above 38.5⁰c **AND**
3. rash

If you're unwell with measles-like symptoms, stay home and telephone your GP team for advice any time of the day or night. Please do not go to your GP in person as you may spread the illness to others. Anyone with measles needs to be isolated from the time they become ill until 5 days after the rash has appeared.

Who is protected from measles?

People who have had two MMR vaccinations (typically given at ages 15 months and 4 years) are immune from measles.

People born before 1969 will have been exposed to the measles virus and will have acquired immunity.

Those born between 1969 and 1990 are considered to have a good level of protection. This group was offered one measles vaccine and evidence suggests that one dose of MMR protects 95% of people from catching measles.

Who are the priorities for vaccination?

The most effective way to stop the spread of measles is to vaccinate those aged 12 months to 28 years who have never received an MMR vaccine.

To prevent the transmission of measles, and to protect those most at risk of developing serious complications from measles, from 28 March 2019 a wider group of people became eligible to receive a second MMR vaccination:

- all those aged 12 months – 28 years
- caregivers of infants aged up to 12 months
- those aged between 29 and 50 who work with children

What if my baby is too young to be vaccinated?

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

Babies under 12 months can also be given immunoglobulin if they have been exposed to a case within six days. For sustained immunity they will still need to receive two MMR vaccines from the age of 12 months.

For children who are too young to have had the measles vaccine, it is advisable that they avoid group events.

Should babies under 12 months attend preschool/events

Those under 12 months cannot be vaccinated so caregivers need to exercise caution about where they go and who they meet with.

Parents of those who are not vaccinated need to be aware that measles is circulating in the community and the unvaccinated are at risk.

Ultimately, we need herd immunity (95% vaccine uptake) for measles not to spread to those who can't be vaccinated – such as babies under 12 months, pregnant women, and those whose immune systems are compromised, such as people undergoing chemotherapy.

Can pregnant women get vaccinated?

Pregnant women cannot be immunised with MMR as it is a live vaccine. See details [here](#). Instead, pregnant women who are not immune and who have come into contact with a measles case within six days can be given immunoglobulin which provides passive immunity.

What happens if there's been a case of measles in a school or early childhood education centre?

Most students in Canterbury have good immunity against measles.

If there is a confirmed case and a risk of transmission, health authorities will advise contacts of the case who are susceptible – including those who have never been vaccinated and those who have only had one vaccine – to stay away until they are given the all clear.

As a general rule, a contact is considered someone who has been in the same room as a confirmed measles case (while the case was infectious) up to one hour after the case was there.

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