

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, 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. a rash

If you're sick stay home and telephone your GP team for advice any time of 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 15months 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 typically had one measles vaccination. A single dose of MMR typically confers 95% of people with immunity, so this group is considered to have a good level of protection.

Who is the priority group for getting vaccinated?

To ensure vaccines are being provided to those in greatest need, a vaccination programme is being rolled out by general practices which prioritises those who need it most – that's those most at risk of harm if they get measles.

The immediate priority is children aged 12 months to 13 years who have never been immunised. GP teams are also focusing on providing the vaccine to young adults aged 14 years to 28 years who have never been immunised.

As more vaccine becomes available the MMR vaccine will be made available to a wider range of people.

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 get 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.

We are not stopping gatherings from happening but 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 those 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 will be given immunoglobulin which confers 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.

Health authorities will be in contact with any school or early childhood centre where there has been a confirmed case and advise accordingly. If there is a confirmed case at their pre-school, child care centre or school, then parents should keep their unimmunised child at home.

As a general rule, a contact is considered someone who has been in a confined space with 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>