

Canterbury

District Health Board

Te Poari Hauora o Waitaha

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about Measles

How does measles spread?

Measles is a highly infectious virus that spreads easily from person to person through the air, via breathing, coughing and sneezing. It affects both children and adults.

It is spread through droplets in the air and through contact, so that anyone unimmunised who has been in the same room as someone with measles will likely get it

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.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles symptoms are:

- Cough or runny nose or conjunctivitis
- AND**
- Fever above 38.5⁰c
- AND**
- A rash

If you're sick stay home – this is good advice if you have any respiratory or flu-like illness. Telephone your GP for advice – do not go to your GP in person as you may spread the illness to other people in the waiting room. Remember in Canterbury you can call your own General Practice after hours – and be put through to a nurse who can provide free health advice.

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 old who have never received an MMR vaccine.

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

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

Who is protected from measles?

People who have had two MMR vaccinations (typically given at 15 months and 4 years) are considered 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 were only offered one measles vaccination and are considered to have a good level of protection - a single dose of the MMR typically provides protection against measles to 95% of people vaccinated. The immunity of this population is much higher than previously thought.

Should people attend large events?

If you were born after 1969 and are feeling unwell with measles-like symptoms, or have never been vaccinated against the measles, we are encouraging these people to stay away from large gatherings.

Those who have never been vaccinated need to be aware that measles is circulating in the community.

There is a real risk that unvaccinated people born after 1969 will catch the measles if they attend large gatherings where someone who is infectious with measles is present. You are infectious before you get a rash, so in the early stages it's impossible to tell who might be developing measles and unknowingly spreading the virus.

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.

What to do if there's been a case of measles in a school or pre-school?

Most students in Canterbury have good immunity against measles.

Health authorities will be in contact with any school or early childhood education centre where there has been a confirmed case and advise accordingly.

If there is a confirmed case at their preschool, child care centre or school, then parents should keep their unimmunised child at home.

What to do if there's been a case of measles in a workplace?

Most people in workplaces are likely to have good immunity against measles. Those born before 1969, and those born after 1992 who have had two MMR vaccinations, are considered immune from measles. Most people aged between 29 and 50 have received one

dose – one MMR protects 95% of people against developing measles.

Health authorities will be in contact with a workplace where there has been a confirmed case and advise accordingly.

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 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, and that others in their household are vaccinated.

Are MMR vaccinations free?

Yes.

How long does it take for the vaccination to work?

It takes two weeks for a person to be fully immune after a vaccination.