

Fact sheet: What is measles?

- Measles is a serious and highly infectious viral disease that can make people very sick and can lead to hospitalisation or, in rare cases, death.
- It is spread from person to person through the air by sneezing or coughing. Just being in the same room as someone with measles for an hour can lead to infection if you are not immunised. One person with measles can pass on the disease to 13 other people who have not been immunised.
- If you are not immunised you could have measles and spread it without even knowing it.
- The only way to prevent getting measles is to get immunised.

What might happen if I get measles?

- A person may be developing measles and not be aware until they actually feel ill – symptoms usually take about 10 days to develop but it might take as long as 18 days.
- The early symptoms include fever, cough, runny nose, sore red eyes and white spots inside the mouth. After 3 to 5 days a rash appears on the head and then moves down the body.
- One in 3 people with measles develop complications, including ear infections, pneumonia or diarrhoea.
- Acute encephalitis (brain inflammation) develops in 1 in 1000 cases, some of whom die and more than one third are left with permanent brain damage.
- One in 1000 people with measles may die.
- One in 10 cases will end up in hospital.

Who is at risk of getting measles?

- If you haven't been immunised and were born after 1969, or have not had measles already, you are at risk of catching the disease.
- It is not just babies – older children, teenagers and adults who are not immunised are also at risk from getting sick from measles.
- Maori children in the Auckland region are particularly at risk as the percentage of 18 month old tamariki who are immunised is only 57%.
- The average immunisation rate of all 18 month old children in the greater Auckland region is low at 72%.
- Anyone with a weakened immune system (for example, people who are receiving chemotherapy or radiotherapy for cancer or people who take high-dose steroid medications) are at risk of measles infection.
- Pregnant women who are not immunised and who get measles are at risk of miscarriage, still birth and low birth weights for their babies. Non immune pregnant women cannot be immunised but it is very important their family and close contacts are immunised to protect the pregnant mother and unborn baby.

The only thing that can stop you or your child catching measles is getting immunised.

If you suspect you or your child is sick with measles contact your GP or Healthline on 0800 611 116.

Auckland Regional Public Health Service

Rātonga Hauora ā Iwi o Tamaki Makaurau



Working with the people of Auckland, Counties Manukau and Waitemata