

Measles

Measles is a highly infectious and potentially serious disease caused by a virus. The first symptoms include a fever, cough, and sore, red eyes (conjunctivitis). This is followed by a rash of large, lumpy, reddish to purplish blotches that often join up and completely cover the skin. The rash spreads over the entire body but usually disappears within 6 days.

Measles often causes very serious complications, including lung infections (pneumonia) and swelling of the brain. Children with measles can be very sick, and adults with measles are usually hospitalised.

The number of cases of measles in Australia has fallen dramatically over the past 15 years because of vaccination programs and other public health measures. However, overseas travellers still bring measles into Australia, so people in Australia can still catch the virus.

How it spreads

Measles spreads from person to person via close contact or droplets in the air that contain the measles virus. The virus is very infectious. People get infected by:

- breathing in infected droplets. The virus can stay in the air even after an infected person has left the room.
- touching a surface contaminated with droplets – for example, hands, tissues, toys or eating utensils – and then touching their mouth.

Vaccination against measles is included in the measles–mumps–rubella (MMR) vaccine, which is part of the routine childhood vaccination schedule in the Australian National Immunisation Program.

Exclusion period

Exclude for 4 days after the rash appeared.

Contacts: Vaccinated and immune contacts are not excluded. For unvaccinated contacts, talk to your public health unit for advice. Exclude all immunocompromised children until 14 days after the rash appears in the last case.

Risks in pregnancy

In very rare cases, measles can cause premature birth. This is mainly seen in unvaccinated people. Getting vaccinated before getting pregnant significantly reduces the risk.

Actions for educators and other staff

Contact your local public health unit for advice if you have a case of measles in your service. In New South Wales and the Northern Territory, education and care services must notify their local public health unit about any cases of measles in the service.

Review vaccination records: Ensure children have received 1 or 2 doses of measles–mumps–rubella (MMR) vaccine, depending on their age. The public health unit will tell you if any unvaccinated children need to be excluded.

Let pregnant staff know there is a measles case in the service and recommend they seek medical advice.

Ensure that:

- all staff have received 2 doses of MMR if they were born during or after 1966
- staff and children have good hand and respiratory hygiene
- staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Actions for parents and carers

Make sure your child is fully immunised against measles by keeping their childhood vaccinations up to date.

Keep your child at home for the exclusion period, or longer, until they are feeling better.

Tell any friends, family or social contacts that your child has measles. These people may need to seek medical advice if they:

- are pregnant or considering starting a family
- are not vaccinated
- have a medical condition that lowers their immunity, such as cancer or HIV
- are taking certain medications.

More information about measles

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of measles (healthdirect.gov.au/measles).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.