

Measles – Information for Contacts

What is measles?

Measles is a highly infectious viral illness and is spread by sharing the same air as someone while they are infectious with measles. People generally develop symptoms of the infection after 7-10 days but may take up to 21 days after having been exposed to an infectious person.

These symptoms begin with:

- fever
- cough
- runny nose
- sore eyes.

The classic measles rash usually begins 2-4 days after the first symptoms, generally starting on the face and then spreading down the body. The rash will last for 4-7 days and sometimes the rash peels. Measles is often thought of as a minor childhood illness but it can cause serious illness, particularly in young adults. Up to a third of people with measles will experience a complication. Complications are more common in young children and in adults. Complications include ear infections, diarrhoea and pneumonia, and may require hospitalisation. About one in every 1000 people with measles develops encephalitis (infection of the brain).

How long does a person remain infectious?

A person with measles is infectious from 24 hours before the onset of the first symptoms until 4 days after the appearance of the rash. A person is most infectious in the 24 hours before the rash appears and therefore before measles is suspected.

Am I at risk of measles?

People who are at risk of measles are:

- Infants under the age of 6 months born to non-immune mothers (if the mother is immune, natural immunity from maternal antibodies is protective for this age group).
- Infants aged between 6 and 12 months of age whether or not the mother is immune.
- All those born after 1966 who have not been immunised with 2 doses of a measles-containing vaccine or do not have a history of having had measles.
- People who have had only 1 measles containing vaccine. Routine childhood measles vaccination did not include 2 doses until 1992 so those born between 1966 and 1992 have often had just 1 dose of vaccine.

- People who are immunocompromised (eg. have decreased immunity) are also at risk – at any age, even if immunised. This includes people with diseases such as Hodgkin’s lymphoma or cancer, HIV and people undergoing cancer treatment or on high-dose steroids.

People born before 1966 most likely had measles and are therefore likely to be immune. If, however, you have no clear history of measles you should consider yourself at risk.

What can I do to avoid measles?

If you have been in contact with someone with measles and you are susceptible to measles your risk of becoming infected can be reduced by vaccination or immunoglobulin. You need to see your doctor or your vaccine provider immediately.

If it is less than 3 days since you came into contact with measles, immunisation with a measles-containing vaccine can prevent infection.

If it is more than 3 days and within 6 days (144hours) since coming into contact with measles, an injection called immunoglobulin may be recommended to protect you from developing measles. Immunoglobulin contains antibodies against the measles virus and is especially recommended for infants, pregnant women and people with underlying illnesses who have a greater risk of developing complications from measles. Immunoglobulin does not provide long term protection from measles and you should arrange MMR vaccine at least 5 months after immunoglobulin treatment.

Subsequent immunisation with measles, mumps, rubella or chickenpox containing vaccines should be deferred until at least 5 months after administration of immunoglobulin, as the immunoglobulin antibodies can prevent these vaccines from working. Discuss with your usual immunisation provider if you have received immunoglobulin and require vaccination against any of these diseases.

Sometimes measles contacts might need to be excluded from the workplace, school or childcare to prevent further spread of the infection. If you think you may at risk of measles you need to discuss your options with your local doctor as soon as possible.

Monitor for symptoms of measles until 18 days after last possible measles contact. The first symptoms of measles are lethargy, fever, runny nose, runny eyes and cough. The rash starts later.

What do I do if I think I have measles?

People with symptoms of measles should call ahead when attending healthcare facilities (such as an emergency department or GP), to inform staff of their symptoms and travel history where relevant, so that they can be isolated upon arrival to limit the potential spread of measles to others.

People with measles should stay at home until they are no longer infectious (i.e until four days after the rash starts) to reduce the possibility of spreading it to other people.

Related information

[Measles NT Health fact sheet](#)

Contact

For more information contact the Public Health Unit’s Centre for Disease Control in your region.

The full list of contacts of contacts can be found at [NT Health](#).

Location	Address	Phone	Fax	Email
Darwin	Ground Floor, Building 4 Royal Darwin Hospital Rocklands Drive Tiwi NT 0810	(08) 8922 8044 1800 008 002	(08) 8922 8310	CDCSurveillance.DARWIN@nt.gov.au
Katherine	O'Keef House Katherine Hospital Gorge Road Katherine NT 0850	(08) 8973 9049	(08) 8973 9048	CDC.Katherine@nt.gov.au
Tennant Creek	Schmidt Street Tennant Creek NT 0860	(08) 8962 4259	(08) 8962 4420	CDC.Barkly@nt.gov.au
Alice Springs	Disease Control Unit Lower Ground Floor Eurilpa House, 25 Todd Street Alice Springs NT 0870	(08) 8951 7540	(08) 8951 7900	CDC.alicesprings@nt.gov.au
Nhulunbuy	Corner Mathew Flinders Way and Chesterfield Court Nhulunbuy NT 0880	(08) 8987 0357	(08) 8987 0500	CDCGove.DoH@nt.gov.au

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