Measles contact information

The following information is specifically intended for people who may have been in contact with a case of measles while infectious.

What is measles?
Measles is a highly infectious viral illness. People generally develop symptoms of the infection after 7-10 days but may take up to 18 days after having been exposed to an infectious person.

These symptoms begin with:
• Fever
• Cough
• Runny nose
• Sore eyes.

The characteristic measles rash usually begins 2-4 days after the first symptoms, generally starting on the face and then spreading down the body. Sometimes the rash peels. The rash will last for 4-7 days.

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 infected 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. They are most infectious before the rash appears so often do not know they have measles.

Am I susceptible to measles?
People who are susceptible to measles are:
• Infants aged between 6 and 12 months of age. If the mother is immune natural immunity from maternal antibodies is protective for children under the age of 6 months;
• 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 1986 so those born between 1966 and 1986 have often had just 1 dose of vaccine.
• People who are immunocompromised (i.e. 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 most likely to be immune. If you have no clear history of measles you should consider yourself susceptible.

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 may be reduced by seeing your doctor immediately for vaccination or immunoglobulin.

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 less than 7 days 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 and people with underlying illnesses who have a greater risk of developing complications if they catch measles. Subsequent immunisation with any measles, mumps, rubella or chickenpox containing vaccine should be deferred until at least five months after immunoglobulin as the immunoglobulin antibodies can prevent the vaccine 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 be susceptible to measles you need to discuss your options with your local doctor as soon as possible.

What do I do if I think I have measles?

If you suspect that you might have measles, make an appointment with your local doctor. Let them know you think you might have measles, and ask for a home visit if possible. If not, try to get the last appointment of the day to avoid coming into contact with other patients in the waiting room.

While a person is infectious with measles it is important that they remain at home to reduce the possibility of spread to other people.

For more information contact the Centre for Disease Control in your region

Alice Springs 8951 7540
Darwin 8922 8044
Katherine 8973 9049
Nhulunbuy 8987 0357
Tennant Creek 8962 4259
or