

Measles – Information for Contacts

What is a measles contact?

A measles contact is a person who has been exposed to the measles virus by breathing the same air as someone who is infectious with measles.

Most contacts will be immune to measles because of past measles infection or immunisation and will not get the disease.

Contacts who are NOT immune are at risk of developing measles.

This fact sheet should be read in conjunction with the fact sheet on measles which can be found at www.health.act.gov.au

Who is at risk of developing measles?

People who may NOT be immune to measles include:

- People born during or after 1966 who have not had two doses of measles-containing vaccine. Those born prior to 1966 when measles was more common are likely to have had measles during childhood and are usually immune.
- Babies aged less than 6 months whose mother has no documented evidence of ever receiving two doses of measles-containing vaccine. In contrast, if the mother is immune, maternal antibodies should protect the baby.
- Babies aged 6-12 months who have not received their first dose of measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine.
- Children aged over 18 months who have not received their second dose of measles-containing vaccine.
- People who have a weakened immune system (for example, people who are receiving chemotherapy or radiotherapy for cancer or people who take high-dose steroid medications) even if they have been fully immunised or have had past measles infection.

What can I do to prevent measles from developing?

Public health officers will advise non-immune contacts who are at risk of developing measles about preventative treatment which may be recommended for them.

If exposure to measles occurred more than 144 hours before being identified as a contact, preventative treatments will not be effective and will not be recommended.

Preventative treatments:

1. Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine

MMR vaccine helps the body to produce antibodies against measles. If it is given to a non-immune person within 72 hours of exposure to measles, it is likely to prevent measles from developing.

MMR vaccine is NOT suitable for everyone and should NOT be given to pregnant women, babies less than 9 months of age, and some people with a suppressed immune system. Advice about vaccination should be sought from a public health officer and/or your medical practitioner.

2. Normal Human Immunoglobulin (NHIG) injection

Normal Human Immunoglobulin (NHIG) may be recommended for some non-immune people who cannot receive MMR vaccine or for people who did not receive MMR vaccine within 72 hours of exposure.

NHIG provides short term protection against measles infection if given within 144 hours of exposure.

Even after receiving NHIG, MMR vaccination is still required to provide long term protection against measles. People should not be vaccinated with MMR or MMRV (measles-mumps-rubella-varicella) for at least 5 months after receiving NHIG.

Can I still develop measles?

Although MMR and NHIG are usually effective in preventing measles, it is possible that symptoms will still develop.

ALL contacts should watch for signs and symptoms of measles for 18 days following exposure to measles whether they have had preventative treatment or not.

Symptoms include fever, conjunctivitis, runny nose, cough and later, a rash.

Should contacts be excluded or isolated?

Some non-immune contacts will be required to exclude themselves from the workplace, school, childcare and other public places. This exclusion period may be up to 18 days after last contact with an infectious case. A public health officer will provide advice about any necessary exclusion or isolation periods.

If you (or someone you care for) develop symptoms of measles:

- Do not attend public places (such as work, school, child care or shopping centres) or use public transport.
- See a doctor, preferably your general practitioner, as soon as possible so a diagnosis can be confirmed. Take this fact sheet along.
- It is very important to call the surgery, any acute care provider or pathology service you might need to attend, ahead of time to alert them of your symptoms and to allow them to make arrangements to assess you safely and without infecting other people.
- Call ACT Health Communicable Disease Control Section on 6205 2155.

Need more information?

For more information about measles, contact your doctor or call the Health Protection Service, Communicable Disease Control Information Line during business hours on **(02) 6205 2155**.

Communicable Disease Control Section at Health Protection Service is responsible for the investigation and surveillance of notifiable or infectious conditions in the ACT in order to control or prevent their spread in the community. This includes the promotion of immunisation, education and other strategies that help to limit the spread of diseases.

Measles is a notifiable disease. Cases notified to ACT Health are investigated by Public Health Officers.

Acknowledgements

1. Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI). Australian Immunisation Handbook, Australian Government Department of Health, Canberra, 2018. Available from: <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au>
2. Australian Government, Department of Health, Measles SoNG 2015. Available from: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cdna-song-measles.htm>

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