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## **MEASLES FACT SHEET**

### **What is measles?**

Measles is a highly infectious viral disease that spreads easily from person to person through sneezes, coughs and contact with respiratory droplets on surfaces such as phones, tables and door handles. Measles can quickly lead to hospitalisation with serious complications such as pneumonia, and swelling of the brain (encephalitis), and in some cases death. It is especially dangerous for babies and as well as pregnant women who are not immune, and those with weak immune systems (e.g. cancer patients).

### **What are the symptoms of measles?**

Measles symptoms include a high fever ( $\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), runny nose (coryza), cough, sore red eyes (conjunctivitis) and white spots in the mouth. A few days later a rash starts on the face and neck, and then spreads to the rest of the body. You can have measles and spread it to others before you feel sick or show any symptoms.

### **How can I protect myself and my family from measles?**

Measles is preventable through vaccination with the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. One dose of MMR is around 95% effective against measles, while two MMR doses is 99% effective against measles. In the Cook Islands, the MMR vaccine has been routinely given to children aged 15 months and four years, however with the measles outbreaks occurring in New Zealand and some Pacific island countries, the MMR vaccine is not provided at six months of age (MMR0), 12 months of age (MMR1) and 18 months of age (MMR2). If you were born in the Cook Islands before 1981, you are likely to be immune to measles. The MMR vaccine will also protect against mumps which is being reported in Auckland. The MMR vaccine is usually protective after two weeks.

### **What should I do if I think I or a family member has measles?**

If you think you have measles, it is important you see a doctor. But ring before visiting your doctor to let them know you think you may have measles. When you get to the health centre or hospital, stay in your car and call (or send in whoever is with you) to say you have arrived. This will help avoid spreading the virus in the waiting room. In Rarotonga call 22664 and ask to speak to a nurse. In the Pa Enuā, call your hospital.

### **What will happen if I do have measles?**

If you catch measles you must stay at home in isolation for five days after your rash appears. This is required so that you do not spread the measles virus to others. You can spread the virus to other people five days before the rash appears and five days after.

### **What will happen if I have been in contact with someone with measles?**

It usually takes 10-14 days for someone who has caught measles to start showing symptoms. If you are not immune (i.e. born after 1981 and not vaccinated with a measles contained vaccine, or never caught measles), you should check with your doctor or public health nurse and stay at home in quarantine. The duration of quarantine will depend on the last time you were in contact with the measles case (public health staff will advise you).

### **How is measles diagnosed?**

Measles is diagnosed with a special test that involves taking some mucous or fluid from your nose or the back of your throat. Sometimes a blood test will also be required. Tests for measles are conducted in New Zealand so there will be some delay in receiving results. During this period it is important that you follow the advice of your family doctor or public health nurse.

### **How is measles treated?**

Treatment for people with measles is symptomatic, that is, fluids, rest, and paracetamol (panadol) for high fever. Specialist treatment is required if patients develop complications of measles.

### **What can I expect after vaccination with the MMR vaccine?**

After vaccination there might be some redness, tenderness and/or swelling at the injection site for a day or two. You may also experience a mild fever, muscle or joint aches or tiredness. These symptoms are the body's normal response to vaccination. Rarely, a high fever, rash, swelling of the glands under the chin and joint pains may develop about 6-21 days after vaccination, this resolves in 1-2 days, and it is not infectious.

Very rarely an allergic reaction may occur soon after vaccination; this is why we require you to wait for 30 minutes after vaccination for observation in the assigned waiting area.

### **Where can I find advice or more information regarding measles?**

For further information please call our public health nurses on 29110 OR

Visit:

- The Cook Islands Ministry of Health website – [www.health.gov.ck](http://www.health.gov.ck)
- The New Zealand Ministry of Health website – [www.health.govt.nz](http://www.health.govt.nz)
- The Auckland Regional Public Health Service website – [www.arphs.health.nz](http://www.arphs.health.nz)
- The Immunisation Advisory Centre website – [www.immune.org.nz](http://www.immune.org.nz)