

MEASLES

Measles is one of the classic childhood illnesses but is rarely seen these days. What is it and why should we be concerned about it?

What is Measles?

- Measles is a contagious viral disease that causes skin rash and fever.

How do You Catch Measles?

- Measles is a droplet infection. That means droplets spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes can infect other people who breathe them in or touch a surface where they have landed and then touch their mouth or nose.

How Contagious is Measles?

- Measles is very contagious – an infected person will infect up to 10 other people. A person is contagious for 24 hours before the rash occurs and a week after it disappears.

What are the Symptoms of Measles?

- The most obvious symptom will be a red blotchy skin rash that appears on the head on about the third day then spreads to the rest of the body.
- Other symptoms include: fever, runny nose, dry cough, sore red eyes and generally feeling unwell. People may also have vomiting and diarrhoea which can cause dehydration.

Are there Complications?

- There are many complications: pneumonia, middle ear infection and respiratory infections.
- A rare complication is encephalitis or inflammation of the brain.
- While people don't die from the measles, they can die from its complications.

How is Measles Prevented?

- A vaccine for measles is available. The first dose of the vaccine is usually given to children at 12 months. A second dose is then given at 18 months.
- People who have already had measles cannot catch it a second time.

Why should we be Concerned About Measles?

- Five years ago Australia was declared measles free due to strong promotion of vaccinations. However, measles is now on the increase – three years ago there were only 7 cases reported in Victoria. So far this year there have been 22 cases in Victoria and nearly 100 cases in Australia.

Why are Cases Increasing?

- While measles isn't common in Australia, it is in other countries, especially developing countries. In addition, currently there is a large outbreak of measles in the US. People travelling to areas where measles exists may become infected and bring the virus back to Australia.
- Cases within Australia are increasing as more children have not been vaccinated leaving them susceptible. Also, babies under the age of 12 months cannot be vaccinated.

If Other People are Vaccinated, Why Do I Need to Be?

- If you are unvaccinated you may catch measles from a tourist, from an unvaccinated person who has recently travelled or if you travel yourself.
- If you catch the measles you may infect others, especially infants who cannot yet be vaccinated.