

# Measles

## Fact Sheet

### What is Measles?

Measles is a highly contagious viral illness that begins with a sudden onset of flu like symptoms such as: fever, runny nose, cough and tiredness as well as sore red eyes, conjunctivitis and sometimes white spots inside the mouth. Approximately 4 days later a red blotchy rash appears on the face and over the next 1 to 2 days spreads over the body. The rash lasts for 4 to 7 days and sometimes the rash will peel.

Measles is more common in children, but also occurs in non-immune adults who often have a more severe illness and suffer more complications than children. Complications from measles include: ear infections, diarrhoea, croup seizures, pneumonia and encephalitis (swelling of the brain), people can also die from measles complications. Due to the highly contagious nature and seriousness of the disease, whenever a diagnosis of measles is made, the Public Health Unit is contacted to trace family members, friends and any other people who may have been exposed to the measles.

People with measles are usually considered infectious from 4 days before the onset of the rash and remain infectious for another 4 days after the rash has appeared. A diagnosis of measles is made by collecting a blood, or urine sample or a nose or throat swab to be sent to pathology for testing. There is no specific treatment for measles, patients are encouraged to rest and drink plenty of fluids and the doctor may prescribe medication to reduce fever.

### Who is at risk from Measles infections?

The high-risk groups for measles infection include:

- People who have not previously had measles or been vaccinated for measles
- Pregnant women

- Newborn babies who are too young to receive the vaccination and non-vaccinated children
- Anyone with a low immunity

People who have been in contact with measles and are not immune to it should see their doctor straight away for treatment to prevent the infection. They should avoid public places such as; school, work and shopping centres until 14 days after the infected person they had contact with developed their rash.

### How can Measles be spread?

Measles is highly contagious and spreads from person to person by contact with the virus particles. The virus particles are very small and are expelled into the air, from an infected person's coughing, sneezing and breathing. The virus remains suspended in the air and people can become infected unknowingly. After contact with a person infected with measles it takes approximately 10 days (called an incubation period) for the measles illness to develop. However, the incubation period has been known to be as little as 7 days and up to 21 days.

### How will my care change whilst in hospital?

- Regular and thorough hand hygiene is one of the most successful ways to prevent the spread of **ALL** infections.
- A sign is placed outside your door to alert hospital staff for the need to use special protective infection control precautions. This sign also alerts visitors of the need to speak with nursing staff prior to entering your room.
- The hospital staff will wear protective apparel such as a face mask, gloves and an apron or gown when they enter your room.

# Measles

## Fact Sheet

- You will be allocated a private room with your own en suite facilities and the door to your room must be kept closed at all times to prevent the spread of the virus into the rest of the ward. To prevent further spread of the infection you are required to remain in your room during the infectious stage.
- If you are required to have urgent medical tests elsewhere in the hospital you will be supplied with a special face mask to wear over your nose and mouth, at all times, when you are outside your room.
- You may also need to be transferred to another hospital that has specialised 'negative pressure' patient rooms available.

### Good Hand Hygiene Practices

Hand Hygiene is the most effective way to prevent **ALL** infections, including the flu and the common cold. Encourage your family and friends to learn and maintain good hand hygiene practices every day. Please refer to the hand hygiene information in the patient information booklet or hand hygiene leaflet available from the Infection prevention and control team.

#### Alternative - Alcohol based hand rub / gel

During your stay in hospital, you may have seen the staff using an alcohol-based hand rub, as an alternative to soap and water. Alcohol-based hand rubs or gels can be used for hand hygiene as long as your hands are not visibly soiled / dirty. There are a variety of brands on the market and are available for purchase at most pharmacies. You may choose to use this type of product at home.

#### Can I still have visitors?

Yes – But visitors who **SHOULD NOT** come to see you are those who **HAVE NOT** had or been immunised against measles, especially children, newborn babies, anyone who may have a lowered immunity or is pregnant. If you are unsure about having contact with your family and friends during

your infectious stage, please speak to your doctor or ask to speak with the infection control nurse.

Whilst you are infectious, your visitors will be asked to wear a mask to protect them from infection; they may also be required to wear gloves and an apron if they are assisting you with care. The nursing staff will direct your visitors in applying these items and in the correct disposal of them as well as educate them on the need to perform hand hygiene before entering your room and when they leave your room. We would appreciate it if you would also encourage your visitors to wear a mask and perform this hand hygiene.

### What happens when I go home?

- When you return home, it is important for you, your family and your friends to continue the good hand hygiene practices that you have been taught in hospital every day.
- It is important that anyone assisting you with close personal care wears gloves if they are going to be in contact with any wounds, blood, urine, or faeces. They must wash their hands well, after removing their gloves and disposing of the gloves immediately in the rubbish bin.
- Children with measles should be kept home and excluded from school and childcare centres until they are no longer infectious. Adults should stay home from work.
- All people with measles should avoid mixing with other people until they are over their infectious stage.
- If you need to attend a hospital emergency department or your GP notify the receptionist of your infectious status on arrival, ask the receptionist to supply you with a face mask and sit away from other people.
- If any member of your household / or a carer is not immune to measles they should consult their doctor prior to you being discharged from hospital.

# Measles

## Fact Sheet

### Where can I get further information?

You can talk to your doctor or the nursing staff. If you wish to speak with the Infection Control Department, ask your nurse to contact us. Our office hours are 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Our contact numbers are (02) 9480 9433 or (02) 9480 9732.

**Alternatively contact your Local Public Health Unit 1300 066 055**

### References

NSW Dept of Health; Communicable Diseases Factsheets – Measles (28 June 2019)

Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Infectious Diseases Factsheets – Measles (Rubeola) (November 5, 2020)

NSW Dept of Health; Infection Prevention and Control Policy PD2017\_013

National Health and Medical Research Council; Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare (2019)

Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI). Australian Immunisation Handbook, Australian Government Department of Health, Canberra, 2018, [www.immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au](http://www.immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au)

