

UPDATED 19 March 2019

Regional Public Health

HAUORA Ā IWI KI TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI
Better health for the greater Wellington region

MEASLES FAQs

The Ministry of Health has modified measles immunisation advice in light of current vaccine supplies.

Note there are currently no measles cases in the greater Wellington region as at 19 March 2019.

What is measles anyway?

Measles is a serious viral illness that:

- is highly infectious
- affects the respiratory system
- spreads easily through coughing or sneezing
- results in one in 10 people in NZ being admitted to hospital.

Measles:

- begins with a fever
- progresses to a cough, runny nose
- sore, red eyes (usually within 2-4 days)
- rash appears 2-4 days after the first symptoms; begins at the hairline, gradually spreads down the body to the arms and legs
- rash lasts up to one week. NOTE: People are most infectious in the days before the rash appears
- usually takes 10-12 days from exposure to the first symptom.

I hear demand for measles vaccine is high but supplies are limited. What does that mean for me and my family in the greater Wellington region?

There are sufficient supplies to maintain the scheduled MMR immunisations at ages 15 months and 4 years across all of New Zealand, and support the Canterbury outbreak response.

Maintaining the 15 months and 4 year immunisation is prioritised. People under 50 years who have not received any previous measles-containing vaccine, and not had measles disease, will be vaccinated as supplies are available.

People who have already had one dose of MMR vaccine and would like a second dose are being asked to wait a couple of weeks before calling their local medical practice to arrange the second vaccination. This will help our medical centres to focus their services on those who need it most.

NOTE: 95% of people who have had 1 dose will be protected from measles disease. The reason we give the second dose is to increase the proportion of people protected to ~99%.

When are you considered protected from measles?

- 95% of people will be protected from measles after 1 dose of measles vaccine (given after 12 months of age)
- 99% of people will be protected from measles after 2 doses of measles vaccine (given after 12 months of age)
- If you have had doctor or laboratory confirmed measles or laboratory evidence of protection
- If you were born before 1 January 1969 - as measles was circulating in NZ before this time.

Currently in New Zealand the first dose of measles vaccine is given at 15 months of age, and the second dose at 4 years of age.

What happens if I/my child has never been immunised and not had measles?

If you, or your child, has never been immunised and your medical centre is not able to offer MMR now, please arrange vaccination at a later stage when demand on supplies has lessened. When vaccine is available, you will be prioritised.

What happens if I'm not sure if I've ever been immunised, or only partly immunised?

Check your own health records e.g. your Plunket or Well Child/Tamariki Ora book first. You can also check with your doctor as the information may be in your medical records. If it's still unclear whether you are protected, vaccination is recommended when supplies are available.

What is the advice for pregnant women?

Pregnant women who become ill with measles risk miscarriage, premature labour and low birth weight infants. If a woman was immunised against measles prior to becoming pregnant, they are almost certainly protected.

NOTE:

- If a pregnant woman thinks they have contracted measles, or have come in contact with someone with measles, they must call their general practice, or lead maternity carer, as soon as possible.
- If not immunised against measles prior to becoming pregnant, women should **not** receive the MMR vaccine during pregnancy.
- Women of child bearing age should avoid pregnancy for one month after having a dose of the MMR vaccine.
- Breastfeeding mothers can receive the MMR vaccine safely.

Women can reduce their chances of catching measles if the people they are in close contact with, eg, close friends, family and work colleagues, are immune. Encourage close friends, family and work colleagues to check whether they have been vaccinated. If not protected, contact their general practice to make a vaccination appointment when supplies are available.

What's the advice for those born before 1969?

Before the measles vaccine was introduced in New Zealand in 1969, almost everyone caught the disease as it is so infectious. Those who have recovered from the disease are almost always immune, so it is very rare to see any measles in people born in New Zealand before 1969.

Measles vaccine was available in some other countries before 1969 so some adults who were born overseas may have received a measles vaccine. It is not therefore generally recommended that people over 50 years be vaccinated with MMR vaccine. However, if you have concerns about whether you are immune, please talk to your general practice or contact the Immunisation Advisory Centre on 0800 IMMUNE.

Where can I get more information?

- [Regional Public Health](http://www.rph.org.nz) (www.rph.org.nz)
- [Ministry of Health](http://www.health.govt.nz/measles) (www.health.govt.nz/measles)
- [Immunisation Advisory Centre](http://www.immune.org.nz) (www.immune.org.nz) 0800 IMMUNE