

# Measles

Measles is very contagious, which means it spreads very easily between people who are not immune. Measles can cause serious health problems, including chest infections and brain swelling, which can lead to hospitalisation or even death. Measles can weaken a person's immune system, leading to long-term effects on their health.



## How do I know if I am immune to measles?

You are considered immune to measles if you have:

- had measles before, OR
- received 2 measles vaccines after the age of 12 months (e.g. the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine).

If you were born or living in New Zealand before 1969, you are likely to be immune because nearly everyone caught measles before then. If you lived in another country before 1969 you will need to check with your healthcare provider.

It is important you check if you are immune to measles and to find medical records, such as immunisation records or test results, to confirm this. For more information on checking your immunity visit [info.health.nz/measles-immunity](https://info.health.nz/measles-immunity)

Immunisation is the best protection against measles. If you are not immune to measles, **or not sure if you're immune**, you should get vaccinated (for more information read the prevention section of this information sheet).

If you are immune to measles and this has been confirmed by your public health service team you won't need to quarantine (stay at home) if you are exposed to someone with measles. Being immune means you are already protected from getting and spreading measles.



## Signs and symptoms – what you can see and feel

Measles symptoms can start anywhere from 7 to 21 days after you have been exposed to someone with measles but will usually start within 10 days.



Red, blotchy  
rash



Fever



Sore, watery  
pink eyes



Cough



Runny  
nose

The first symptoms of measles are like other respiratory illnesses, such as COVID-19 and influenza (the flu). With measles, a rash normally appears 3 to 5 days after the other symptoms. The rash starts on the face and then spreads to the rest of the body. **If you have a fever and rash, and you are not immune to measles (or you're not sure), follow the information in the seeking health advice section.**



## Seeking health advice

If you think you or someone in your family has measles, you should stay at home and call your GP, doctor, Hauora or healthcare provider, or call Healthline free on 0800 611 116, anytime 24/7 for advice as soon as possible. **In an emergency call 111.**

It is important you call ahead if you are visiting a healthcare provider so they can protect others from being exposed. During your visit wear a disposable face mask that covers your nose and mouth at all times.



## How does measles spread?

**Measles spreads very easily between people who are not immune.** Measles is passed on by an infected person breathing, talking, sneezing or coughing near others. You can even catch measles by entering a room after the person with measles has left. One person with measles could spread it to as many as 18 other people.

A person with measles can spread it to others before they know they have it. This can happen from 4 days before until 4 days after the rash appears.



## Who is at risk of getting very sick with measles?

About 1 in 3 people with measles will be sick enough to need to go to hospital. Although this can happen to anyone, some people are more likely to get very sick if they get measles. This includes:

- children aged under 5 years old, especially babies under 12 months
- anyone with a weakened immune system, including during pregnancy and for up to 6 weeks after giving birth (if you get measles while you are pregnant you could get very sick and it could also harm your baby)

Māori and Pacific peoples are more likely than other ethnic groups to be hospitalised with measles.



## What happens if I get measles?

If you have measles, you will need to isolate (which means staying at home) until 4 days after the rash started. This stops you from spreading measles to others. As most people take 1 to 2 weeks to recover from measles, you might not feel well enough to return to your usual activities such as work or school at the end of your isolation period. It is important to give yourself time to recover.

You will be contacted by your public health service team who will provide you with information and support. This includes:

- checking on your symptoms and wellbeing
- asking you about where you went and who you spent time with while you were able to spread measles
- making sure you know what to do if your symptoms get worse.



## What happens if I've been exposed to measles?

If you have been exposed to measles, you may be identified as a 'close contact' or 'casual contact'. A close contact is more likely to develop measles. The actions you will need to take depend on whether you are not immune, partially vaccinated or immune to measles.

**Your public health service team will contact you to provide you with support and further information on what you need to do as a close contact.** They will check your records and may ask you to get a blood test to check if you are immune to measles. You may need to quarantine (stay at home) until advised otherwise. Please follow the specific advice given to you by your public health service team.

If you are **not immune** you are at risk of getting and spreading measles. You will need to quarantine (stay at home) to prevent spreading measles to others.

If you **have only had one measles vaccination** you are considered **partially vaccinated, meaning you might not be immune to measles** and are at risk of getting and spreading it. You will need to:

- stay away from places measles could spread easily, such as healthcare providers, schools and early learning services
- stay away from people who could get very sick with measles (read the who is at risk of getting very sick with measles section above)
- monitor for measles symptoms and if you get any of these symptoms, it may mean you have measles and it is very important you isolate (stay at home) and get health advice.

If you are **immune and this has been confirmed by your public health service team** you are very unlikely to get and spread measles so you can continue your usual activities such as work and school, if you are feeling well. In the unlikely event you get measles symptoms, isolate (stay at home) and follow the seeking medical advice section above.



## Prevention

Immunisation is the best way for people to protect themselves against measles, 99% of people who have had 2 measles vaccines (e.g. the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine) after the age of 12 months, will be immune to getting and spreading measles to others.

- Babies usually get their first MMR vaccination at 12 months old and their second at 15 months old. Getting your baby immunised on time is the best way to protect them.
- The MMR vaccine is **free** for all people aged under 18 years and for people aged 18 years and over who are eligible for free New Zealand healthcare. For information on eligibility to publicly funded healthcare visit [Get publicly funded health services | New Zealand Government](#).
- If you have a health condition that has weakened your immune system, speak to your healthcare provider to check if you can have the MMR vaccine.
- While you are pregnant you cannot have the MMR vaccine, but you can have the MMR vaccine after giving birth and it is safe to have while breastfeeding. It is important to make sure you're fully immunised against measles if you're planning a pregnancy.
- If you don't know whether you have had 2 vaccinations for measles, it is recommended you get another MMR vaccine (it is safe to have extra doses).

For more information about MMR vaccination visit [info.health.nz/MeaslesVaccine](https://info.health.nz/MeaslesVaccine)

To get vaccinated contact your GP, doctor, Hauora or healthcare provider, or call the Vaccination Helpline free on 0800 28 29 26 (8.30am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday) this service has interpreters available and you can choose to speak with a Māori or Pacific advisor, a disability advisor, or use NZ Relay. You can also book a vaccination appointment at [info.health.nz/bookavaccine](https://info.health.nz/bookavaccine). Many pharmacies offer MMR vaccination and some can also vaccinate children. These providers can be found at [healthpoint.co.nz/immunisation](https://healthpoint.co.nz/immunisation)



### For more information:

- Visit the Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora website [info.health.nz/measles](https://info.health.nz/measles)
- Free NZ Relay Services are available at [nzrelay.co.nz](https://nzrelay.co.nz) if you are Deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or have speech communication difficulties.
- Call Healthline on **0800 611 116**, anytime 24/7 for free health advice and information about what to do next. You can choose to speak with a Māori clinician if you are calling between 8am and 8pm. Interpreter services and NZ Relay support are also available.
- For people living or visiting rurally, you can contact a doctor after hours at Ka Ora Telecare **0800 2 KA ORA (0800 252 672)** or [www.kaora.co.nz](https://www.kaora.co.nz)
- A dedicated helpline for Disability support is available Monday to Friday, between 8.00am and 5.00pm. Call free on **0800 11 12 13** or text **8988** for help and information or visit [healthpoint.co.nz/disability-helpline](https://healthpoint.co.nz/disability-helpline)