

Measles Information for Health Professionals

Measles is a highly communicable infectious disease. It is an acute viral illness which starts non-specifically with a prodromal phase of fever, cough, running nose and conjunctivitis. A classic maculopapular rash appears on the third to seventh day of illness, usually starting on the head and face. The rash normally lasts four to seven days. The incubation period is most commonly 8 -12 days but can be up to 18 days.

The person is highly infectious from the first day of illness until four days after the appearance of the rash. Once confirmed one case of measles can potentially infect up to 13 people. Please have preventive measures in place to avoid contact with other patients in the waiting room.

Please notify the Medical Officer of Health if measles is suspected via the Hospital switchboard.

Diagnosis of suspected measles

Is there a clinically compatible illness?

- **fever, > 38°C**
- **Coryza**, runny nose / nasal discharge
- **Cough**, 'hacking' type of cough
- **Conjunctivitis**, watery eyes and can be associated with photophobia
- **Koplik spots**, white spots on the buccal mucosa
- **Skin rash**, maculopapular rash, typically begins behind the ears and on forehead then spreads to face, neck, trunk and finally arms and legs. It lasts four to seven days and disappears in the same pattern.

About 10 percent of measles cases develop complications such as pneumonia, otitis media, diarrhoea, or in rare cases, encephalitis (which may lead to permanent neurological damage or death).

Other considerations

- **What is the patient's vaccination status?**
- **Has the patient been exposed to a confirmed case or travelled in an area where there is measles?**

Laboratory testing is only needed at the beginning of an outbreak - please discuss with the on-call Medical Officer of Health. If lab tests are needed the Measles reporting form from the Canterbury Health laboratories needs to be completed by the GP or Practice nurse for all measles related laboratory requests.

<http://www.measles.co.nz/specimen-guidelines>

Nasopharyngeal swab

Please see the separate advice on types of swab and the correct procedure.

Serology for IgM and IgG - Red or Gold topped tube

Please note

Laboratory testing to assess immunity is not recommended – instead offer a further vaccination if necessary.

MMR vaccination offers protection against measles, mumps and rubella. MMR should be offered to nonimmune and partially immune contacts. Non-immune contacts should be isolated to prevent the risk of spreading the disease during the prodromal period and to prevent the risk of catching the disease. Further details are in the Immunisation Handbook.