

Communicable Diseases Factsheet

Measles: information for contacts



Last updated: April 2023

Measles is a serious disease that is easily spread through the air. Contacts are people who shared the same air as someone who was infectious with measles. Contacts who are not immune may go on to develop the infection and need to be alert for any of the symptoms.

What is a measles contact?

'Contacts' are people who share the same air as someone while they are infectious with measles (for example, being in the same room as someone with measles). Contacts can go on to develop measles symptoms in 7 to 18 days after sharing the same air.

Many contacts will be immune to measles because of past measles infection or immunisation and will not get the disease. Other contacts who are not immune may catch the virus and may then go on to spread the virus to others. It is sometimes possible to stop the infection in non-immune - either by giving Measles, Mumps Rubella (MMR)-containing vaccine or by giving an injection of normal human immunoglobulin (NHIG).

Who is at risk of measles infection?

People are at risk of measles if they have been a contact of someone with measles and if they are not immune to measles. People who are regarded as not immune to measles include:

- People born during or since 1966 who have not had two doses of MMR-containing vaccine
- Babies under the age of 12 months who have not received their first dose of MMR vaccine
- Children over 18 months who have not received their second dose of MMR (or MMRV) vaccine
- Any people who have a weakened immune system (for example, people who are receiving chemotherapy or radiotherapy for cancer or people who take high-dose steroid medications) even if they have been fully immunised or have had past measles infection.

What should contacts do and what are the symptoms?

- Make sure they are up-to-date with measles vaccination.
- Look out for symptoms.
- The first symptoms of measles are feeling tired, fever, runny nose, sore runny eyes and cough. The rash starts later.
- As a precaution, it is a good idea not to have contact with anyone who may be at risk until 18 days after your exposure.

If you (or your child) develops symptoms of measles

- Do not attend public places (such as work, school, early childhood education and care services or shopping centres) or use public transport.
- See a doctor, preferably your general practitioner, as soon as possible so a diagnosis can be confirmed. Take this fact sheet along.
- Call the surgery ahead to alert them of your symptoms and to allow them to make arrangements to assess you safely and without infecting other people. Ask to be given a mask and to be isolated so you don't spread the infection.
- Call the local public health unit.

Further information

For more information please contact your doctor, local public health unit or community health centre

Public Health Unit contact details

You can contact your local public health unit by calling 1300 066 055