Information for school communities about measles

Sydney is currently experiencing an outbreak of measles which began in April 2012 and is centred in the South Western Sydney and Western Sydney regions. Many of the cases have been high school students, with a smaller number in primary school. There is potential for the measles outbreak to spread further given young people have large social networks both within and outside of school.

NSW Health advises that measles is a serious viral illness that mainly affects unvaccinated children, teenagers, young adults, and babies too young to be vaccinated. Measles is highly infectious and can easily spread through the air.

Immunisation is effective in preventing the disease. In Australia, infants and young children are vaccinated with measles-mumps-rubella vaccine at 12 months and 4 years of age. People who are at risk of measles include:

- Infants <12 months who are too young to have been routinely vaccinated
- Older children who have not received 2 doses of measles-containing vaccine
- Adults born during or after 1966 who have not received 2 doses of measles-containing vaccine and haven’t had measles infection in the past.

Immunising older siblings and non-immune adults will help prevent the spread of infection to infants who are too young to be vaccinated and who are at risk of severe disease.

The first sign of measles is a high fever which usually begins about 10 to 12 days after exposure to a person with measles (range 7-18 days). A runny nose, cough, red and watery eyes (conjunctivitis), and small white spots inside the cheeks can develop in the initial stage. The rash appears around 14 days after exposure, usually starting on the face and upper neck and spreading over the body, hands and feet. The rash lasts for 4-7 days.

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION:**

People with measles are usually infectious from just before the symptoms begin until four days after the rash appears. If you have had contact with someone who has had measles and develop a fever, runny nose, cough, red and watery eyes, it may be measles and seek medical advice.

If you suspect measles, see your doctor, clinic or hospital. It is important to ring before your consultation so you can be seen as soon as possible and arrangements can be made to avoid contact with other patients in the waiting room who may be susceptible to measles.

A person with measles should remain at home until four days after the rash appears to reduce the possibility of spreading it to other people.


30 August 2012