



To all **school principals**

**26 February 2014**

We understand that this is a busy time of year for schools. We appreciate your support in helping to inform your staff, parents and caregivers about measles, and the steps they can take to protect themselves, their children and their community from this preventable disease.

Between late December 2013 and 24 February 2014, there have been 47 confirmed measles cases reported in New Zealand: 29 in Auckland, 15 in Bay of Plenty/ Lakes, and three in Wellington. Some of these cases have been in pre-school aged children. A total of eight cases have required hospitalisation to date.

Most cases have occurred in unimmunised people, and immunisation remains the best way to prevent infection and spread within the community.

There are ongoing measles outbreaks in places like the Philippines, Australia, Europe, UK, Africa, Asia, India and North America. So international students, families travelling to these areas over the holidays, or with visitors from these countries should be aware of the symptoms.

### **Measles symptoms:**

Measles is a highly infectious disease that affects both adults and children. Measles is more serious than many people realise. Symptoms include fever, cough, red eyes and a runny nose, followed by a rash which tends to start on the face, before moving over the head and down the body. The rash develops about 3 days after the other symptoms start.

Complications can include middle ear infections, pneumonia, and, more rarely, encephalitis or brain inflammation.

The best protection against measles is the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine which is free for all children. MMR vaccinations are scheduled at 15 months and 4 years.

MMR vaccination is also free for susceptible adults born after 1 January 1969 who have not received two doses of a measles containing vaccine.

### **What schools can do:**

Prevent measles from spreading by:

- 1. Telling staff, parents and caregivers** about the current measles cases.
- 2. Asking staff, parents and caregivers to make sure that their immunisations and their children's immunisations are up-to-date.** Anyone born after 1 January 1969 should ensure they are fully immunised against measles. If they are unsure, they can check with their family doctor.

Pregnant women can't be vaccinated against measles while they are pregnant and are at greater risk of measles complications if they get sick.

People who are in close contact with pregnant women, or those with reduced immunity (such as people receiving chemotherapy) can help protect them by being immunised against measles.

- 3. Updating your immunisation register.** All primary schools must keep an immunisation register under the Health (Immunisation) Regulations 1995. This means you can quickly identify unimmunised children who have been in contact with someone with measles and help reduce the risk of measles spreading.

### **Measles at your school:**

#### **Separate unwell children**

If a child becomes unwell with possible measles, separate any unwell child from other children while waiting to be taken home. This helps minimise the risk of measles spreading.

#### **People with measles must stay home**

Students and teachers with measles are infectious from 5 days before to 5 days after the onset of rash and must stay away from school and follow the advice of the local medical officer of health. Those students that have not been fully immunised (two doses of MMR) or those with no immunity to measles, who have been in close contact with a measles case during the infectious stages must stay away from school for 14 days from their last contact. It is recommended that teachers should also follow this practice. These requirements are under the Health (Infectious and Notifiable Diseases) Regulations 1966 (Regulation 14). These exclusions also apply to staff and students taking part in interschool sporting and other events.

### **More information:**

For further health information on measles and measles immunisation please visit the Ministry of Health website <http://www.moh.govt.nz/measles> or the Immunisation Advisory Centre website <http://www.immune.org.nz>. You can also call the Immunisation Advisory Centre toll-free on 0800 IMMUNE (0800 466 863) for advice.

If you would like to discuss any of the issues in this letter, please contact your local public health service. You can find more information at <http://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/key-health-sector-organisations-and-people/public-health-units/public-health-unit-contacts>

Thank you again for your support in helping to inform your staff and your community about measles and its prevention.

Yours sincerely

Dr Darren Hunt  
**Director of Public Health**  
**Ministry of Health**