

21 March 2019

MEASLES ALERT FOR SCHOOL KIDS, BACKPACKERS

NSW Health is urging people to be alert for measles symptoms after a backpacker and primary school student were diagnosed with the highly-contagious disease.

The latest cases involve a man and an unvaccinated primary school student, taking the total number of people diagnosed with measles in NSW since December to 25.

The man, who is in his 20s, was infectious while staying at the Central Perk Backpacker's Hostel in Haymarket in Sydney's CBD. He is believed to have been vaccinated against measles as a child, but the number of doses cannot be verified.

The local Public Health Unit has visited the hostel to provide preventive injections and advice to other residents.

While infectious, the man also visited:

- Coles World Square, 650 George Street several times between March 9 and 18
- Other shops near the hostel and World Square between March 9 and 18
- St Vincent's Hospital Emergency Department, March 18 between 2:45pm-3:30pm

People who visited those venues at the same time as the man should be alert for symptoms of measles until 5 April. It can take up to 18 days for symptoms to appear following exposure.

Parents of students at Bonnyrigg Heights Primary School, where the child with measles attends, are also advised to watch out for symptoms in their children. Students who haven't had two doses of measles vaccine should stay away from school until April 2.

While infectious the child visited:

- Russell's Barber Shop, Wilson Road, Green Valley on March 14 between 11:00am and 12:30pm
- Edensor Road Family Medical Centre, 195 Edensor Road, Edensor Park on March 18 between 11:00am and 11:45am
- Fairfield Hospital Emergency Department on 18 March between 12:35pm and 1:45pm

The local Public Health Unit is contacting other patients who may have come into contact with the infectious child at the medical centre and hospital.

NSW Health Director of Communicable Diseases Dr Vicky Sheppard said while the places visited by the man and student pose no ongoing risk, people who may be susceptible to measles and were there at same time should contact their local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055.

“Preventive injections can be given to highly-susceptible people up to six days after exposure to measles,” Dr Sheppeard said.

“The measles-mumps-rubella vaccine is safe and effective protection against measles. It’s free for anyone born during or after 1966 who hasn’t already had two doses. If you’re unsure whether you’ve had two doses, it’s safe to have another.”

Measles symptoms include fever, sore eyes and a cough followed three or four days later by a red, blotchy rash spreading from the head and neck to the rest of the body.

“If you develop symptoms, please call ahead to your GP to ensure you do not wait in the waiting room with other patients,” Dr Sheppeard said.

Outbreaks of measles in popular tourist destinations, particularly the Philippines, means the risk for measles being imported into Australia remains high.

Out of the 25 people diagnosed with measles in NSW since last December, 19 were infected while overseas. Seven of those had visited the Philippines.

Dr Sheppeard said while the backpacker and school student were infected with measles in Sydney, the source of the infection in both cases was still under investigation.

“These two cases highlight how easily the measles virus can spread among unvaccinated people following importation of the disease from overseas,” she said.

Measles is spread in the air through coughing or sneezing by someone who is unwell with the disease. For more information on measles visit:

health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/measles/Pages/default.aspx