

3 June, 2019

Measles alert for the Central Coast and plane passengers

NSW Health is alerting Central Coast residents and people on a 25 May flight from the Philippines to Sydney to be aware of measles symptoms after an infant on the flight was diagnosed with the disease.

The infant, who is under 12 months of age, was infectious while on Cebu Pacific flight 5J 41 - which arrived from Manila at Sydney International Airport at 09:50am - and developed a measles rash a few days after.

While the risk of infection is low in fully-vaccinated people, anyone on this flight and at Sydney International Airport around the arrival time, including at baggage carousels and in customs areas, are advised to watch for symptoms over the next two weeks, as it can take up to 18 days for symptoms to appear following exposure to a person with measles.

This latest case of the highly contagious disease has pushed the total number of people in NSW diagnosed with measles to 35 this year (42 since Christmas 2018).

While infectious, the infant also visited:

- Toukley Family Practice, Wednesday 29 May, 11:00am - 12:00pm
- Wyong Hospital Emergency Department, Wednesday 29 May, between 10:00pm and 11:30pm, and Friday 31 May, between 05:30pm and 07:00pm.

NSW Health's Communicable Diseases Branch Acting Director Dr Sean Tobin said while these sites do not pose any ongoing risk to the public, the local public health unit is working to identify other people who were present when the infant attended and who may be highly susceptible to measles.

People in these Central Coast locations at the same time, who may be highly susceptible to measles such as:

- Children under the age of 12 months,
- people with a weakened immune system (e.g. from cancer therapy or high dose steroid use),
- pregnant women,

should contact their local public health unit on 1300 066 055, as preventive injections can be administered to people up to 6 days after exposure, for highly susceptible people.

All people who were at the same locations at the same time as the infant should be alert for signs and symptoms of measles until 18 June.

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

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. Measles can be spread in the air through coughing or sneezing by someone who is unwell with the disease.

Outbreaks of measles in popular tourist destinations means the risk for measles being imported into Australia at the moment is high.

NSW Health urges everyone to ensure they are fully vaccinated before heading overseas. Infants under 12 months of age can receive their first measles vaccine as early as six months old to protect them when they travel.

“The measles-mumps-rubella vaccine is safe and effective protection against measles,” Dr Tobin said.

“It is 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 quite safe to have another.”

Protecting children from potentially deadly diseases is a key priority for the NSW Government, which has invested approximately \$130 million in the 2018-19 Immunisation Program budget, including Commonwealth and state vaccines.

The latest Annual Immunisation Coverage Report shows vaccination rates in NSW are at their highest level ever, with more than 95 per cent of five-year-olds vaccinated against measles.

For more information on measles visit:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/measles/Pages/key-facts.aspx>