



Measles and pregnancy

What is measles?

Measles is a serious viral disease that can make people very sick. It is passed on by breathing, sneezing or coughing. If you aren't protected against measles, you can catch it just by going into a room that someone with measles was in an hour before.

Measles symptoms

Measles symptoms include a high fever, runny nose, cough and sore red eyes. A few days later people get a rash that starts on the face and then spreads to the rest of the body.

If you develop symptoms call your doctor. You can also call Healthline for free anytime on 0800 611 116. Healthline operates 24/7 and has interpreters if you need one.

**In an emergency always call 111.
If you need to go to your doctors you should call ahead first and tell them you have symptoms.**

Measles protection

You will be protected against measles (considered immune) if you:

- Were born before 1 Jan 1969
- Have had measles before
- Have had two MMR vaccinations, and the last dose was over a month ago. Babies under 15 months are considered immune if they have had one MMR dose after 12 months of age, given at least a month ago.
- Have had a blood test showing you are immune

The risks of measles in pregnancy

If you get measles while you're pregnant it may harm your baby. It can cause miscarriage or stillbirth, premature labour and low-birth weight infants.

How to check if you're protected against measles

To check if you are protected against measles talk to your GP or lead maternity carer (this may be your midwife or obstetrician). You can also check your

Plunket or Well Child Tamariki Ora book if you have it.

In New Zealand you're meant to get the MMR vaccine as a child, however lots of people aged 15 – 29 years old missed out when they were younger, so may not be protected. It's never too late to catch up.

Getting vaccinated before you get pregnant

If you aren't protected against measles or aren't sure, then the safest option is to get vaccinated before you get pregnant. You can get the MMR vaccine from your doctor, and some pharmacies. You'll need two doses at least one month apart. After getting your second dose you should wait a month before trying to get pregnant again.

If you're already pregnant then you won't be able to get the vaccine.

Getting vaccinated after you give birth

If you aren't protected against measles you should get the MMR vaccine as soon as you can after giving birth to protect you and your baby. It's safe to get the vaccine while breastfeeding.

Getting your baby vaccinated

Children are given the MMR vaccination at 12 and 15 months as part of their routine immunisations. This is completely free.

If mum is already vaccinated their baby gets some protection against measles for a few months after being born.

You can also help protect your baby by ensuring other people who come into contact with your child have also had the MMR vaccine.

Coming into contact with someone who has measles

If you have come into contact with someone who has measles while you are pregnant you should call your lead maternity carer or GP for advice.

What happens next, and the risks to you and your baby, will depend on whether or not you're protected against the virus.

If you've had two doses of the MMR vaccine, or had measles before

You and your baby will be safe and you will not need to do anything. Two doses of the vaccine protects 99% of people against the virus.

If you've only had one dose of the MMR vaccine

You do not need to stay home in quarantine, but you should still take some precautions. One dose of the vaccine protects 95% of people against the virus, so there is a low risk you may have caught measles.

It's important to watch out for measles symptoms. You should call your doctor if you start to feel unwell with a fever, cough, runny nose, sore eyes or a rash. You can also call Healthline for free anytime on 0800 611 116.

For 14 days you should stay away from early learning services. During this time please also avoid healthcare facilities, except to get vaccinated or if you require urgent medical attention. Wear a mask and call first to say you are a measles contact.

If you aren't sure if you're vaccinated

If you are not sure if you're vaccinated your lead maternity or GP can arrange for you to have a blood test to check. The test is free if you have been in contact with someone who has measles.

If you aren't vaccinated, haven't had measles before or a blood test shows you are not immune

If your records or the blood test do not show you have any protection against measles, then you may have caught the virus.

You will need to stay home in quarantine, to reduce the risk of passing it on to others. Your doctor or another health professional will explain how this works, what you need to do and when.

You may also be given a special medicine to try and protect you against

measles. To be effective this medicine needs to be given shortly after you were in contact with the person who has measles. Even if you are given the medicine, you'll still need to stay home in quarantine.

If you are likely to go into labour in the next three weeks you will need to develop a birth plan with your lead maternity carer. They can then make sure anyone else who'll be around you during your labour and delivery is also protected against measles, including other mums and new babies in the same hospital or maternity ward.

For more information

For more information visit:

- Measles disease www.arphs.health.nz/measles.
- Measles vaccination www.health.govt.nz/measles-vaccine