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Ongoing measles outbreak in NSW drives push for vaccination

A recent surge in measles cases in NSW has prompted an urgent reminder for people to check they and their children are fully immunised for measles.

Dr Vicky Sheppeard, Director of Communicable Diseases at NSW Health, said measles is highly contagious among people who are not fully immunised.

“Measles is spread through coughing and sneezing, and is one of the most contagious infections known,” Dr Sheppeard said.

“Complications can range from swelling of the brain and pneumonia to ear infections and diarrhoea.

Since the beginning of the year, 26 cases of measles have been reported in NSW. Measles continues to be brought back to Australia by under-vaccinated young travellers to Philippines and South-East Asia. As a result, people have now been infected with measles in Bathurst, on the Central Coast and in various parts of metropolitan Sydney. An infectious traveller has also spent time in Tamworth, Armidale and Singleton.

“NSW Health urges everyone to ensure they are up to date with their vaccinations. Anyone born during or after 1966 should have two doses of measles vaccine (at least 4 weeks apart). This is particularly important for those planning on travelling overseas, especially to the Philippines,” Dr Sheppeard said.

Children should receive a measles vaccine at 12 months and a second dose at 18 months. Babies who are travelling before their vaccines are due can be given the first dose as early as 9 months of age.

Children over 18 months who have not had their second dose of measles vaccine can be vaccinated now.

“People returning from overseas, especially from the Philippines, should be on the look out for symptoms of measles, which starts with a fever, cough, sore red eyes and a runny nose for several days before a blotchy rash appears.

“People who have these symptoms should see a doctor - but call ahead to protect others in the waiting room. They should let the GP know that they could have been exposed to measles overseas,” Dr Sheppeard said.

For more information on measles, please go to www.health.nsw.gov.au.

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