

GAUTENG MEASLES OUTBREAK

Update: June 2017

Over the last two months, there has been a number of confirmed measles cases in different areas of Gauteng. Presently in the West Rand District, 16 confirmed cases have been identified since 11 May 2017 with a high number of results from suspected cases still pending. This includes two cases admitted to Intensive Care Units with measles complications. The Gauteng Department of Health and community leaders on the West Rand are working together to respond. Due to the potentially fatal and debilitating consequences of measles, it is important that persons are aware of the symptoms, seek help early and are vaccinated to prevent infection and spread of measles to others. The Gauteng Department of Health provides measles vaccine free of charge at local clinics, and following community engagement, will be able to offer a vaccination campaign in the affected West Rand community during the week of June 19-23, 2017. The measles vaccine is safe and effective. Vaccination is important to prevent spread to communities and vulnerable persons in South Africa who may be more at risk for complicated measles and death, because of poverty, poor access to health care and underlying health problems.

1. What is measles and who is at most risk?

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by the measles virus. It is usually seen in children, but persons of all ages who have not received measles vaccine can be infected. People at high risk for severe illness and complications from measles include infants and children aged <5 years, adults aged >20 years, pregnant women and persons with compromised immune systems, such as from leukemia and HIV infection

2. How is measles transmitted and what are the signs and symptoms of measles?

Measles is spread by droplets from respiratory secretions of infected persons; it is transmitted by breathing, coughing or sneezing, and also by direct contact with infected nasal or throat secretions. The incubation period for measles ranges from 10-14 days. A person who has measles is infectious (able to pass measles virus on to others) from 4 days BEFORE the rash appears until 4 days AFTER the rash disappears. Measles starts with respiratory tract symptoms – similar to the common cold or ‘flu’, with ‘the three C’s’: conjunctivitis (red, watery eyes), cough and coryza (runny nose), fever, tiredness and muscle pain. The rash of measles usually appears 3 – 5 days after the start of symptoms, beginning on the face and spreading down the body. Complications of measles include severe pneumonia, bronchiectasis (scarring of the lung), blindness and occasionally death.

3. What should I do if I think that I or someone in my family has measles?

Most people with measles recover with rest, and supportive care. However, it is important to visit a doctor to confirm the diagnosis, and make sure complications of measles do not occur. Complications can be prevented by giving high dose vitamin A. Sometimes antibiotics may be required to treat secondary bacterial infection. The diagnosis of measles is made by the laboratory on a blood specimen. The NICD does testing for measles at no cost, as it is a notifiable disease. Your doctor can request that the laboratory send the specimen to the NICD so that no charge is incurred. Throat swabs or urine tests may also be requested during an outbreak. The consulting doctor will also send a measles notification form to the local health department, so that they can provide preventative care to people you may have come in contact with.

4. How can measles be prevented?

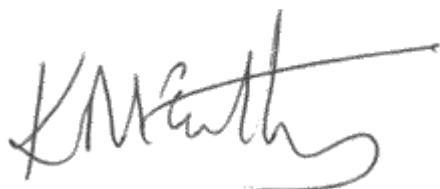
Vaccination is the most important way of preventing measles. In South Africa, children are vaccinated against measles as part of the SA-EPI (Expanded Program on Immunisation) schedule at 9 months of age and receive a booster at 12 months of age. After two doses of vaccine 95% of persons will be protected from measles. Immunity lasts for many years after vaccination. During outbreaks, vaccination campaigns often focus on schools and crèches to immunize children. Adolescents and adults who are unsure if they have been vaccinated during childhood can also receive vaccine, especially if they may be in contact with persons who have measles (e.g. parents, health care workers, school teachers).

5. Is the measles vaccine safe?

The measles vaccine is safe. Side effects are rare, and include pain at the injection, and mild rash or fever (1 in 20 vaccinated persons). There have been concerns by some religious communities about the composition of the vaccine. Currently, public and private providers in South Africa use the MeasBio® (Biovac) vaccine. In the private sector, some providers may offer a vaccine called Priorix® which contains measles, mumps and rubella virus (MMR) but this vaccine is not available in South Africa until the end of July 2017. The MeasBio® (Biovac) vaccine contains porcine gelatine but it is currently the ONLY option available in South Africa. The previous vaccine for measles called Rouvax (Sanofi Pasteur) did not contain porcine gelatine but it is no longer manufactured.

6. Where can I find out more information?

Visit the NICD website at www.nicd.ac.za for further information. Members of the public should consult their local doctors for clinical advice. Health care professionals can contact the NICD Hotline +27 (0) 82 883 9920. The Amayenza vaccine hotline on 011-475-2994 can provide vaccine-specific information. The websites of the USA Centre for Disease Control (<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/hcp/index.html>) and the World Health Organization (<http://www.who.int/topics/measles/en/>) have additional resources.



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