

# MEASLES



## INTRODUCTION

Historically measles is known as one of the most dangerous diseases of childhood. Worldwide Measles accounts for nearly 777,000 deaths annually of which 452,000 come from Africa. In the past most cases of measles occurred in children under the age of one year, but now more and more cases are occurring in older children and even in adults.

## What is measles?

Measles is a highly infectious disease that causes;

- high fever (hot to touch)
- fine red rash
- cold/flu-like symptoms (cough, runny nose and watery red eyes).

Measles can have the following complications;

- pneumonia (infection of the lungs)
- infection of the middle ear which can cause deafness
- ulceration of the eyes which can cause blindness
- malnutrition
- brain damage and even death.

## What causes measles?

A very small germ called the measles virus causes measles. It cannot be seen with the naked eye. It is spread when a person suffering from measles coughs or sneezes, passing on the germ to others.

## Why immunise against measles?

Measles spreads so easily that a child who has not been immunised will most likely get the disease if exposed to it. The measles virus can remain in the air for up to 2 hours after a person with the disease has left the room.

Since the discovery of a vaccine to prevent measles in children, the number of deaths due to measles has been significantly reduced.

## Who is at risk?

- Infants less than one year of age who are too young to have been immunised
- Immuno- compromised including HIV positive people
- **Any person who has not had measles infection or has not been vaccinated against measles**

## Can measles be treated?

The risk of death from measles can be greatly reduced if the disease is recognised early before complications develop. It is important to take the child to the nearest health facility as soon as measles is suspected.

## Can measles be prevented?

- Measles can be prevented through vaccination. South Africa's Immunisation Policy requires that all children have a record of immunisation against measles or documentation of exemption for a specific reason.
- In South Africa children are given measles immunisation at 9 months and repeated at 18 months.
- People who have measles should stay away from others until at least 4 full days have passed since the time the rash first appeared
- **Women should not get the vaccine if they are already pregnant or plan to get pregnant within 3 months after getting vaccinated**

## How is the measles vaccine given?

Measles vaccine is given as an injection in the thigh or upper arm

### Immunisation to a child under one year



### Immunisation to a child above one year



## What is the role of parents and the community?

Parents and the community members can help by ensuring that all children in the community are immunised against measles at the correct ages. If you know of children who are not immunised against measles, then you should urge their parents or guardians to take them for immunisation.

Any child who is suspected to be suffering from measles should be taken immediately to the nearest health facility for **examination and investigations**. Spread of the disease to other children in the community will be prevented and treatment will be given to prevent severe measles and complications.

**For further information,  
please contact your nearest  
Primary Health Care Centre  
or Clinic**

Compiled by:  
Expanded Programme on Immunisation  
Department of Health  
Private Bag X828  
Pretoria  
0001  
Tel: 012 312 3174/ 0099/ 0111