Measles cases require urgent notification

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Measles is on the list of infectious diseases requiring [immediate preliminary notification](https://www.hpsc.ie/notifiablediseases/listofnotifiablediseases/) by telephone to a [Medical Officer of Health](https://www.hpsc.ie/notifiablediseases/whotonotify/).

This legislative requirement means that medical practitioners should urgently notify suspected clinical cases of measles. This enables immediate control measures to be put in place.

As measles is not commonly encountered, it is crucial for medical practitioners to have a high index of clinical suspicion about those who are not fully vaccinated, and those who have travelled overseas. Information about cases is necessary for Public Health to commence contact tracing. This may involve isolating the case and non immune contacts, and can involve post-exposure prophylaxis. Vaccination needs to be administered within 72 hours, therefore timely diagnosis and notification is vital.

**Measles symptoms and diagnosis**
The symptoms of measles include conjunctivitis, coryza, fever, followed by typical rash. The rash usually begins on the face and ears before spreading to the trunk and rest of the body.

To diagnose measles, a buccal/salivary swab is required – using an OraCol swab. Where a medical practitioner suspects measles, they should immediately notify the Medical Officer of Health.

Further information about measles symptoms and diagnosis is available at: [HPSC website](https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/vaccinepreventable/measles/)

**Why does measles require immediate preliminary notification?**
Measles is a highly infectious disease which can cause serious complications, particularly in children under one year of age, pregnant women, and the immunosuppressed.

Measles outbreaks are being reported around the world including a large outbreak recently reported in England. This is due in large part to reduced immunisation coverage as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on routine immunisation programmes.

Uptake rates of MMR vaccine in Ireland are currently below the rates recommended by WHO to prevent measles from spreading.

Getting the MMR vaccine is the best way to prevent the spread of measles. Children need two doses of the vaccine to be fully protected.

Because of suboptimal vaccine coverage and increasing likelihood of cases being imported, it is vital that Public Health can act swiftly to limit control and prevent measles. When measles is immediately notified this means Public Health teams can put in place measures to prevent further spread of the disease, this includes isolation, contact tracing and giving vulnerable contacts treatments to prevent them getting measles. This has to be done quickly to be effective.