

Wednesday, 20 August 2014

## **HEALTH ALERT AS MEASLES CASES DETECTED**

Victoria's Chief Health Officer Dr Rosemary Lester has confirmed three cases of measles at a school in Essendon.

Dr Lester said a further two pupils at Essendon North Primary School the school were being investigated as suspected cases.

"All five pupils have not been immunised, further strengthening the importance of parents and guardians ensuring their children are vaccinated against highly infectious diseases such as measles," Dr Lester said.

"Because the ill children have attended a range of places while they were infectious, but not displaying symptoms, it is important for people in the Essendon area to be aware of the signs and symptoms of measles.

"The illness usually begins with common cold symptoms such as fever, sore throat, red eyes and a cough. The characteristic measles rash usually begins 3-7 days after the first symptoms, generally starting on the face and then spreading to the rest of the body.

"Anyone developing these symptoms is advised to ring ahead to their GP or hospital and alert them that they have fever and a rash.

"If you know you have been in contact with a measles case please alert your GP or hospital emergency department. The GP or hospital will then be able to provide treatment in a way that minimises transmission.

"The school has excluded all unimmunised pupils, staff, volunteers and visitors for their protection.

"Measles is a highly infectious viral disease that can cause serious illness, particularly in very young children and adults. People with measles are often hospitalised.

"People can develop pneumonia and other serious complications from the disease," Dr Lester said.

The groups of people most at risk of catching measles are:

- Anyone who is unvaccinated;
- Adults between 33 and 47 years - as many in this age group did not receive measles vaccine; and
- People who are immunocompromised (i.e. have decreased immunity) - at any age, even if they have had measles or have been immunised. This includes people with diseases such as cancer, and people who are undergoing cancer treatment or are on high-dose steroids.

Measles vaccine (given as a combination with other vaccines) is currently recommended on the National Immunisation Program as a two dose schedule for children between 12 months and 4 years of age. Immunisation is the best protection against measles.

### **Media inquiries:**

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