



## Australian Government

### Department of Health and Aged Care

Chief Medical Officer

Dear colleagues

With ongoing measles outbreaks overseas, we have seen a recent increase in confirmed cases across Australia, most commonly in unvaccinated and under-vaccinated adults aged 20 to 49 years. It is important to remember that measles is a vaccine-preventable disease.

I am concerned by declining vaccination rates, which currently sit below the target of 95% required for herd immunity. I urge you to remind your patients that vaccination is the best protection against measles.

Measles is a very serious and highly transmissible disease. In an unvaccinated or under-vaccinated population, a single contagious person can potentially infect up to 18 other people. Measles can cause complications in up to one in three unvaccinated people. Significant complications include brain swelling, pneumonia, pregnancy loss, and lasting disability such as deafness, seizures, and serious movement problems. A small number of people die from progressive brain inflammation many years after their initial infection.

People are also more likely to catch other illnesses such as influenza, chickenpox or whooping cough after recovery from measles, even if they only had mild illness. Loss of immune memory can cause people to become more ill, more often, from diseases they were previously immune to. This means people could require repeat immunisation.

Adults can also spread measles to babies and young children, who are more likely to suffer serious complications from measles.

I want to take this opportunity to emphasise the critical role of vaccination in preventing measles. Vaccination is safe and highly effective in protecting against infectious diseases. In Australia, two doses of measles vaccine offers 99% protection against illness and serious complications.

The combination measles vaccine is recommended for:

- children aged 12 and 18 months
- adolescents and adults born since 1966 who have not received two doses of a measles-containing vaccine, and

- infants aged 6 months to less than 12 months who may be travelling overseas or to high-risk areas.

Vaccination is important for adults with higher risk of exposure, particularly:

- people travelling, or returning from, overseas
- healthcare workers
- childhood educators and carers, and
- people who work in long-term care and correctional facilities.

The measles vaccine is available for free for eligible children under the National Immunisation Program (NIP). Eligible people under 20 years of age and humanitarian entrants or refugees of any age can also get free NIP catch-up vaccinations. The measles vaccine can also be purchased privately by patients who are not eligible for a free vaccine under the NIP.

I urge you to speak with your patients about being vaccinated to protect themselves against measles. We know that a positive recommendation from a trusted health professional is an important factor in people deciding to accept vaccination. I strongly encourage you to check that your patients are up to date with their immunisations and provide any catch-up vaccinations that may be required.

Thank you for your assistance in preventing the spread of measles, and in safeguarding the health of our communities.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Lawler', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Professor Anthony Lawler  
Chief Medical Officer

15 April 2025