

# Measles still circulating

## Authorities suspect undiagnosed cases in Dunedin

By **ELSPETH MCLEAN**

THE Dunedin English measles outbreak which began in January continues, and health authorities believe there could be more than the 31 cases they know about.

Otago-Southland medical officer of health Dr John Holmes said people who had not already been in touch with their doctors but believed family members might have contracted the disease should contact Public Health South.

The 31 cases which have been identified can all be traced to the original cases, which arose in a family which had travelled to Vietnam.

Knowing about any other cases would help determine the extent of the outbreak.

Logan Park High School and at least one other school has had cases of the illness, but Dr Holmes was not prepared to identify the other schools.

The measles cases are the first in Dunedin since 2001.



**Dr John Holmes**

Most of the cases have involved children aged 3 and above, with a mean age of about 14½ years.

Dr Holmes said none of the children who had been diagnosed with the illness had been vaccinated.

The vaccination status of the three adults who have had the illness was still being investigated.

Records show 12 males and 19 females have had the illness, but Dr Holmes said that was not necessarily significant, because there could be many reasons for the difference.

Parents who believed their children might have the illness should advise their general practitioner of their concerns before turning up at the surgery to ensure they did not put other

### English measles

- ▶ Initial symptoms include fever, tiredness, irritability, a cough, runny nose, and inflamed eyes
- ▶ Later, spots may appear in the mouth. Eyes are sensitive to light, and a rash appears on the face and spread to the rest of the body.
- ▶ In some cases, it can cause serious illness.

**Seek medical help if you think your child has the illness and:**

- ▶ has trouble breathing.
- ▶ is complaining of a stiff neck.
- ▶ is very drowsy or cannot be woken.
- ▶ is coughing up green or yellow thick sputum or complaining of pain in their back.
- ▶ is complaining of sore ears.
- ▶ has a fit.
- ▶ has not passed urine for 10 hours.
- ▶ is under a year old or has other chronic health problems.

patients at risk, Dr Holmes said.

It was also important not to ignore symptoms which could be serious and might actually be other illnesses, such as meningococcal disease.

Symptoms of the illness include a cough, sensitive eyes, rash and high fever.

No hospital cases have been recorded in this outbreak, but Dr Holmes said one in a thousand cases had serious consequences.

The adults appeared to have been the most miserable of those who had the illness in Dunedin,

he said.

Informal feedback from doctors suggested parents were responding to the call to ensure their children's vaccinations were up to date.

Babies are considered to be protected by their mother's antibodies and do not receive their first vaccination until 15 months. Another is needed at age 4.

The vaccine was considered to be 95% to 97% effective, Dr Holmes said.

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