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Measles outbreaks in South East Asia trigger vaccination reminder for travellers

Measles outbreaks in the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia have prompted an urgent reminder for people travelling to South East Asia to check they and their children are fully immunised for measles before their departure.

Dr Vicky Sheppard, Director of Communicable Diseases at NSW Health, said measles is highly contagious among people who are not fully immunised.

“Measles is spread through coughing and sneezing, and is one of the most contagious infections known,” Dr Sheppard said.

“Complications can range from diarrhoea and ear infections to swelling of the brain and pneumonia.

“In recent weeks there have been 5 cases of measles reported in NSW. Two were associated with travel to Vietnam, one to Indonesia and one to the Philippines. The most recently identified case was likely infected at Sydney Airport. In Australia, 41% of cases in 2014 have been imported from overseas, mostly from the Philippines.

“NSW Health urges everyone planning on travelling to South East Asia to ensure they are up to date with their vaccinations before they travel. Anyone born during or after 1966 should have two doses of measles vaccine (at least 4 weeks apart). Even one dose gives around 90% protection.

“Children should receive measles vaccine at 12 months and a second dose at 18 months of age. Babies who are travelling before their vaccines are due can be given the first dose as early as 9 months of age.

“Children over 18 months who have not had their second dose of measles vaccine can be vaccinated now.

“People returning from the South East Asia should be on the look out for symptoms of measles, which starts with a fever, cough, sore red eyes and a runny nose for several days before a blotchy rash appears. People who have these symptoms should see a doctor - but call ahead to protect others in the waiting room. Let the GP know that they could have been exposed to measles in South East Asia.

For more information on measles, please go to www.health.nsw.gov.au.

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