

## Passengers potentially exposed to measles

People who arrived in New Zealand last Tuesday (4 January) on an Emirates flight from Dubai via Melbourne may have been exposed to measles, the Ministry of Health has today advised.

Australian health authorities have advised that a passenger on that flight - Emirates EK406, which departed Dubai on 3 January, flying via Melbourne to Auckland on 4 January – has been confirmed as a case of measles.

That passenger disembarked after 13 hours at Melbourne, but many other passengers on the flight continued on to Auckland. Measles is easily spread through the air, and people sitting in a row close to the affected passenger are potentially at risk.

The Ministry of Health says any passengers on that flight who feel they may be unwell should call Healthline on 0800-611-116.

“They should **not** go directly to a doctor’s office or to an emergency department, because if they do have measles they might infect other people,” says Dr John Holmes, Chief Advisor on Population Health for the Ministry of Health. “Instead we recommend they call Healthline – who will give them advice on what to do next.”

Dr Holmes says measles is now rare in New Zealand, thanks to vaccination. We had three outbreaks in 2009/2010, each of which was started by people who were infected overseas.

“People tend to underestimate measles - the reality is it can be a nasty disease. One in ten people who catch measles will need to be hospitalised, which tells you this isn’t by any means a mild illness.

“Measles can’t be easily treated once you get it, so the best way to prevent the disease is through immunisation.

“The Ministry recommends that anyone aged under 40 who has not had measles in the past, should ensure they have been vaccinated. If they did not receive two doses of MMR vaccine when they were younger, they should contact their doctor to get free immunisation against measles.

“Over the past decade some people declined the combined Measles Mumps Rubella (MMR) vaccination due to false claims that the vaccine was linked with autism. Just last week a six year study published by the British Medical Journal showed those allegations to be an “elaborate fraud”.

International studies over the past decade have also concluded that there is no link between vaccination and autism,” Dr Holmes said.

The Ministry has sent information about the Emirates flight to public health units around the country. However there are still around 20 people who sat in the rows nearest the infected passenger and whose current locations within New Zealand are unknown.

Dr John Holmes says “The symptoms those passengers need to watch out for are:

- \* first off: fever, runny nose, sore eyes
- \* followed about two days later by a red blotchy rash
- \* some people develop further complications such as diarrhea or a middle ear infection

“If you were on that flight and you detect any of those symptoms call Healthline toll free at any hour of the day or night on 0800 611-116,” Dr Holmes said.

**(ends)**