



Australian Government

**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

Measles in Australia

Quick facts

Due to an effective vaccination program in Australia, measles is now mostly found among infants too young to be vaccinated and young adults who were unvaccinated or only partially vaccinated in childhood.

Most cases now diagnosed in Australia can be traced back to a person who became infected overseas.

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious viral illness. Infected people spread measles through coughing and sneezing. The virus can survive in the air and on surfaces for a couple of hours.

Symptoms usually start with fever, runny nose, cough, red eyes and sore throat. A few days later a rash appears, first on the face or neck and then spreading over the body, which lasts up to a week.

Serious complications of measles include infections like pneumonia (lung infection) and encephalitis (brain inflammation). Adults and young children are more likely than older children and adolescents to develop complications. About 1 in 15 children with measles develops pneumonia and 1 in 1,000 develops encephalitis. For every 10 children who develop measles encephalitis, 1 dies and up to 4 have permanent brain damage.

Vaccination against measles

The Australian National Immunisation Program (NIP) has included a measles vaccination since the mid-1970s, though it had been offered by the states and territories for several years prior to this. The NIP first included measles mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine in 1989. The NIP provides MMR vaccine for infants and a combined MMR-varicella (MMR-V) vaccine for young children.

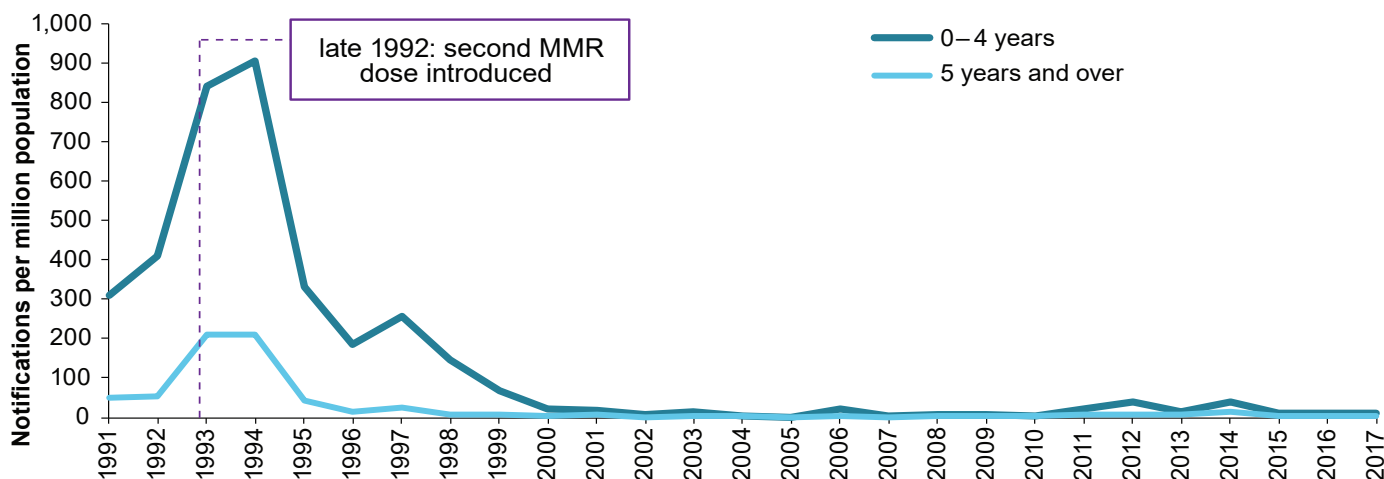
Australia was declared free of measles in 2014, which means that there is no ongoing local transmission of measles within the population (although the infection can still be brought in from overseas), and a system is in place to detect cases. Although measles is now uncommon in Australia, vaccination is still important because travellers can be infected while overseas, and can carry the virus back to Australia. Because measles is so contagious, most of the population needs to be immune to measles to stop it spreading.

In 2017, 93% of Australian 2 year olds were fully vaccinated against measles; however, vaccination rates vary by where a child lives.

Measles notifications

Since 1991, measles has been a nationally notifiable disease in Australia, which means that diagnosed cases of measles are reported to state or territory health departments. This way, a public health response can be undertaken to try and prevent further cases.

Notification rates fell significantly after the introduction of a second dose of MMR for school aged children in late 1992. However, measles outbreaks still occur from time to time and are usually traced back to infected overseas travellers. There were 81 notifications of measles in Australia in 2017.

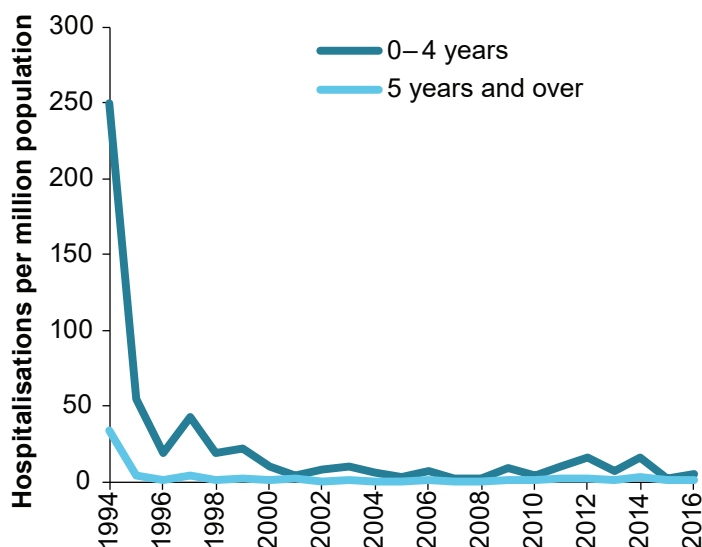


Source: AIHW analysis of NNDSS data extracted on 03 August 2018.

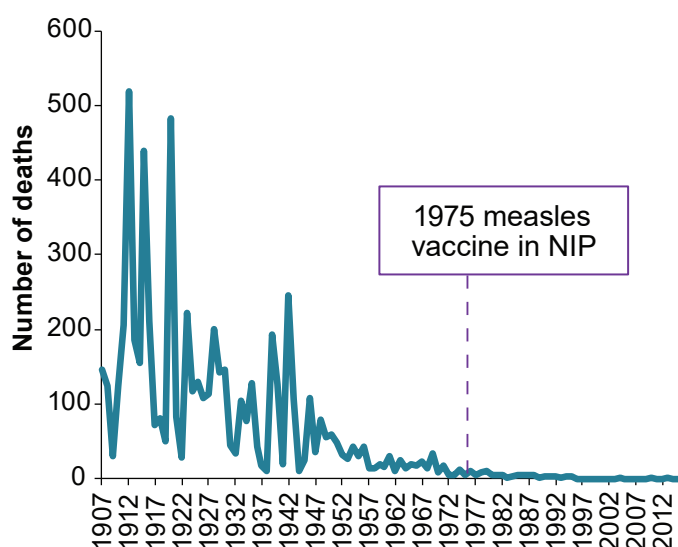
Hospitalisations and deaths due to measles

In 2016, there were 50 hospital admissions for measles in Australia. The rate of hospitalisation for measles is highest among young children (left figure).

The number of measles deaths in Australia has fallen to near zero since vaccination was introduced for all infants (right figure). Between 1996 and 2016, only 3 reported deaths were caused by measles. Between 1976 and 1995, there were 98 deaths caused by measles, while in the previous 2 decades (between 1956 and 1975) there were 356 measles deaths.



Source: AIHW analysis of National Hospital Morbidity Database.



Sources: AIHW analysis of National Mortality database; AIHW 2010 GRIM books

This fact sheet is part of the [Vaccine-preventable diseases](#) release. For more information see [Immunisation](#) on the AIHW website.

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