

# KZN Health urges the public to vaccinate children against measles

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In a bid to mitigate the possible spread of measles and other communicable diseases in the province, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health would like to urge parents to ensure that all children have a complete vaccination schedule. This follows the diagnosis of a few isolated cases of measles in three Districts: EThekweni, Umgungundlovu and Ilembe recently.

Measles is a viral infection, spread from person to person through saliva by coughing, sneezing or being in close contact with an infected person. Symptoms include fever, a rash and flu-like symptoms.

Complications can include lung infection (pneumonia), diarrhoea, dehydration, blindness, brain infection (encephalitis) or death. Most people recover fully from measles, but complications are unpredictable. It is common in children but old people who have not received the measles vaccine can also be infected.

The Department has recently discovered that there are currently 27 cases of measles in KwaZulu Natal (KZN) and they are in the following Districts:

- Ethekewini (14 confirmed cases and 3 suspected cases);
- Umgungundlovu (6 confirmed cases); and
- Ilembe (2 confirmed cases)
- Uthukela (1 confirmed case and 1 suspected case)
- King Cetshwayo ( no confirmed case and just 1 suspected case)

The majority of these cases were mostly diagnosed amongst a particular community and are being traced with the aim to offer the measles vaccination irrespective of age. The confirmed cases are of people between the ages of 9 months old and 51 years of age. The Department would like to once again encourage people in the affected communities to take advantage of the vaccination that is offered in public health institutions. This should be done urgently in order to avoid any further transmission of the virus.

Vaccination is the most effective way of preventing measles and other opportunistic diseases that might affect growth development in children.

Children are vaccinated against measles as part of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (SA-EPI) schedule at 6 months of age and again receive a booster at 12 months. At least 95% of people get protected from measles after the two doses.

The Department will continue to liaise with the affected communities to communicate all measles response activities which need to be implemented. The Department would like to reiterate that people should be aware of symptoms of measles so that they can seek help early and be vaccinated to prevent infection and spreading measles to other people.