

MEASLES CAN BE DEADLY

Measles is a familiar infectious disease, but it is not just a simple childhood complaint: when complications set in it can be deadly.

Measles can be complicated by serious chest infections like bronchitis or pneumonia or by infection of the ear or eye. About 90 per cent of measles deaths are caused by pneumonia complications, and occasionally it affects the brain.

Parents are warned by the N.S.W. Department of Public Health that measles can be a great danger to children under 5 years of age. Children with a bad feverish cold—which could be the first symptom of measles—should be kept away from school.

Symptoms

Early symptoms of measles are like those of a common cold at its height, with sneezing, a harsh cough, and a high fever. Young children often complain that light hurts their eyes.

The fever lasts for about two to four days. The characteristic bright pink rash appears on the third or fourth day beginning on the face, and later spreading to other parts of the body; as it spreads the spots increase in size and number and become a deeper red. By the sixth day a brownish discoloration replaces the pink and red rash.

The brown discoloration begins to fade, but "staining" may remain on the skin for as long as two weeks after the initial rash appeared. The brown skin often peels and the rash fades.

How it spreads

Measles is one of the most readily transmitted diseases. It is spread between people by droplet infection (coughing and sneezing) and by articles such as handkerchiefs freshly soiled by discharges from the nose and throat of an infected person.

The infected material is carried in the secretions of the nose and throat of a patient suffering from or sickening for the disease.

A person can spread the disease from four days before till five days after the rash appears. Babies under six months old are usually well protected against measles, unless their mothers are susceptible to the disease.

After an attack of measles has been overcome, the patient has an almost complete immunity to the disease. There have been very few cases of re-infection or relapse.

A child with a bad feverish cold should be kept away from school: he could be suffering from the first symptoms of measles.

Isolation

When measles has been diagnosed, the patient should be separated immediately from the rest of the family in the house, and should be kept isolated until at least five days after the rash appears.

The patient should be given for his use only crockery, cutlery and bed linen—which should be sterilized and disinfected after each use.

All visitors should be kept away from him, particularly those not in the family. These people not only risk becoming infected themselves, but they could carry germs which could lead to severe complications (like pneumonia) in the patient.

If your child has measles don't let him play with other children suffering from the disease.

Pen Friend Please

Mary Kelly, 17, of P.O. Box 133, Balranald, N.S.W., 2715, would like to correspond with any boy or girl over 17 years of age. Mary likes pop. music and all kinds of sport. Her hobbies are dancing, playing the guitar, swimming, and writing.