

MEDIA RELEASE

28 April 2006

UPDATE - NATIONAL MEASLES ALERT

The Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA) today issued an updated warning about measles following the detection of 31 measles cases in five states and territories in the past fortnight.

On 21 April, the CDNA issued a national measles alert following the discovery of seven cases in Western Australia over Easter that were linked to a national spiritual tour.

The cases were all in people who attended or interacted with those attending workshops held by the Amma (Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi) group in Fremantle at the end of March and the beginning of April.

The Amma Australian tour also included meetings and retreats in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Some of these gatherings attracted crowds of up to 1000 people. The tour group departed Australia for Singapore on 17 April.

CDNA Chair, Dr Robert Hall, said of the now 22 reported measles cases, 19 of them have been directly linked to Amma meetings or flights on which Amma members flew.

There have been 15 measles cases reported in New South Wales, 12 in Western Australia, two in South Australia and one each in the ACT and Victoria.

Twenty of the cases are in children aged one to 11 years. The remaining 11 cases are in adults aged from 17 to 58 years. All but six of the adults were not immunised against measles. All the children who contracted measles are unimmunised.

Dr Hall reinforced last week's alert message and said anyone aged under 45 years who attended the Amma meetings and events and who has not previously received two doses of measles vaccine should contact their medical practitioner to arrange urgent MMR or measles vaccination.

"It is important for doctors to be alert for any new measles cases and to report such cases immediately to their relevant State or Territory Health Department or Public Health Unit," he said.

"It is also important to advise your doctor or emergency department in advance that you are presenting with measles-like symptoms so arrangements can be made to prevent spreading measles to other patients."

Measles can be a severe disease, particularly in adults and very young children. The incubation period for measles is around 10 days but can stretch to 18 days.

Early symptoms of measles include a cough, runny nose, high fever, conjunctivitis or a red blotchy rash that may appear three days later starting on the face and spreading to the rest of the body.

The CDNA prepared a fact sheet about the measles outbreak last week. It is available at: www.health.gov.au/cdna

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