



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.

Measles vaccination remains important because people can bring back the virus after travelling overseas.

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious viral illness. It spreads easily through coughing and sneezing by infected individuals.

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

Serious complications of measles can include pneumonia (lung infection) and encephalitis (brain inflammation). Complications are most common in children under 5 and adults over the age of 30.

About 1 in 20 children with measles develops pneumonia, which is the most common cause of death from measles in young children. About 1 in 1,000 children with measles develops encephalitis (swelling of the brain) which can lead to convulsions and can leave the child deaf or with intellectual disability.

Vaccination against measles

The Australian National Immunisation Program (NIP) has included a measles vaccination since the mid-1970s, although it had been offered by the states and territories for several years prior. In 1989, the NIP introduced the measles mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. Currently, the NIP provides one dose of MMR vaccine at 12 months of age and another combined MMR-varicella (MMR-V) vaccine at 18 months of age.

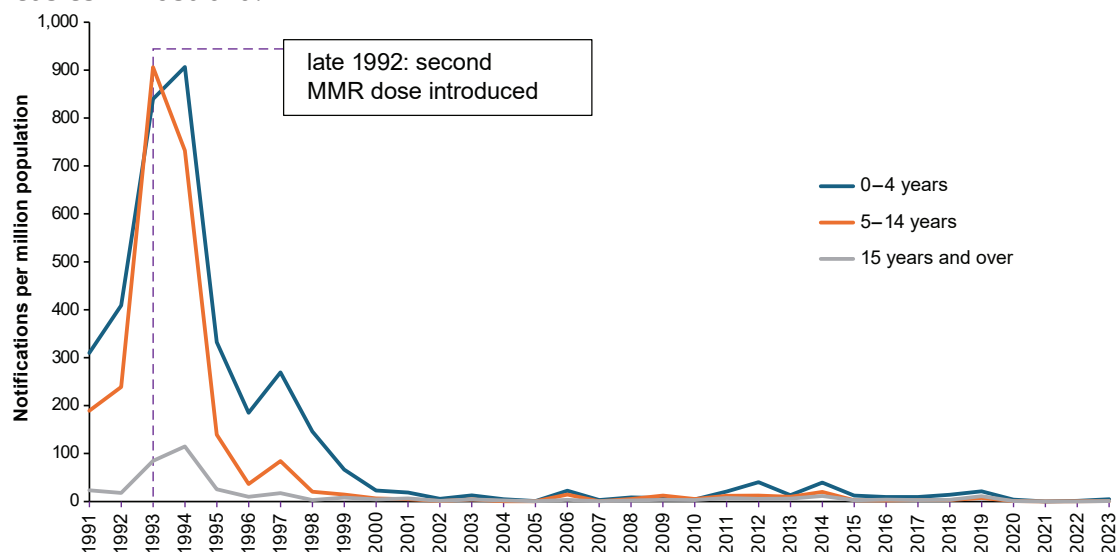
Australia was declared free of measles in 2014, which means that there is no ongoing local transmission of measles within the population (although the infection can still be brought in from overseas), and a system is in place to detect cases. Although measles is now uncommon in Australia, vaccination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

In 2023, 93% of Australian 2-year-olds were fully vaccinated against measles.

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.

Notification rates fell significantly after the introduction of a second dose of MMR for school aged children in late 1992. However, imported cases and small outbreaks still occur from time to time and are usually traced back to infected overseas travellers. In 2023, there were only 26 notifications of measles in Australia.

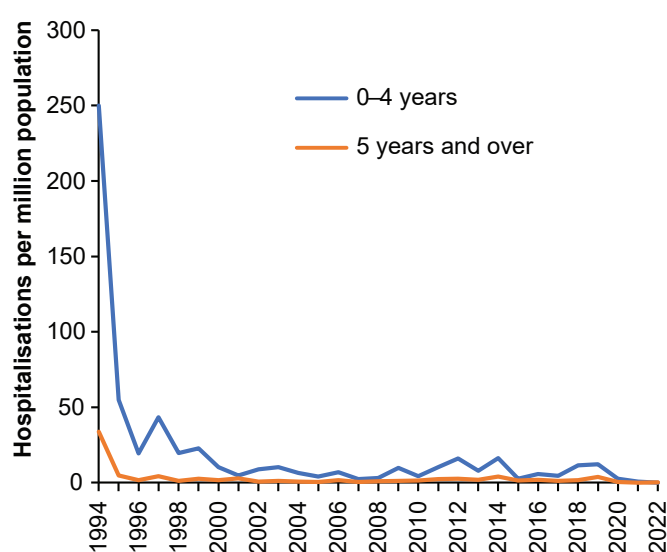


Source: AIHW analysis of NNDSS data extracted on 03 November 2024.

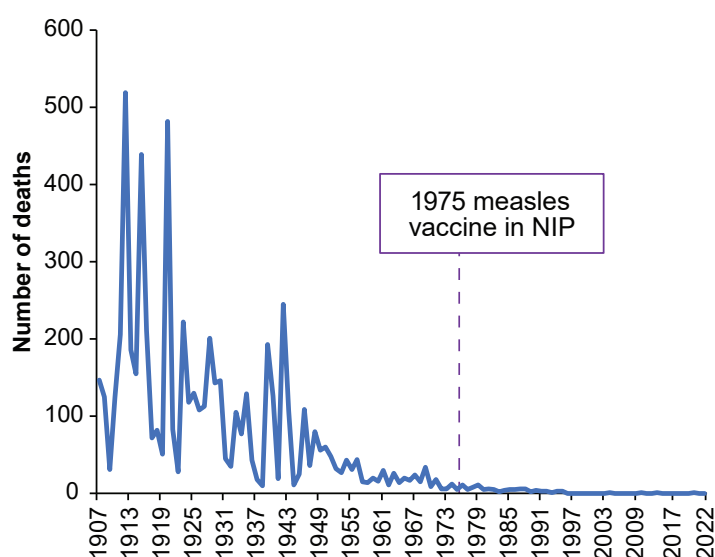
Hospitalisations and deaths due to measles

In 2022, there were fewer than 6 hospital admissions for measles in Australia. The rate of hospitalisation for measles declined significantly since 1994 and is highest among young children (left figure).

The number of measles-related deaths in Australia has dropped to near zero since measles vaccination was introduced for all infants in the mid-1970s (right figure). Between 2000 and 2022, only 4 deaths from measles were reported. In contrast, between 1976 and 1995, there were 98 deaths caused by measles, while in the two decades prior (1956–1975) there were 356 deaths caused by measles.



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.

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2025

Vaccine-preventable diseases fact sheets. Cat no. PHE 236. Any enquiries about copyright and/or this fact sheet should be directed to: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, GPO Box 570, Canberra ACT 2601, Tel: (02) 6244 1000, Email: <info@aihw.gov.au>.