

Cape Town warns of measles outbreak

PRETORIA: The City of Cape Town has warned that a measles outbreak, which started in Gauteng last year, has spread to the Western Cape.

There have been just over 100 cases of measles reported in Cape Town since October 2009. The majority of these cases were children under the age of five and health workers between 30 and 39 years of age.

In a statement, the city said that ahead of April nation-wide polio and measles campaign, city health officials and the provincial Department of Health would closely monitor any local outbreaks, conduct routine follow-ups and launch targeted campaigns in these areas.

It urged parents who are unsure if their children under the age of five have received the recommended measles vaccines to take their child to the nearest clinic for catch-up doses.

"Measles is a preventable disease, and the city urges residents to be aware of the symptoms and to ensure that their children's vaccinations are up to date," said Dr Ivan Bromfield, Executive Director: City Health.

All children should routinely receive a measles vaccination at nine months as well as a booster injection at 18 months.

Measles is an acute infection caused by the measles virus and is one of the most infectious of all agents. The illness is characterised by a cough, runny nose, fever and a blotchy red rash typical to measles that appears several days after the initial symptoms.

The rash first develops in the facial area, with swelling of the eyes, conjunctiva, and a redness of the mouth. The rash then spreads over the body within three to seven days.

A person who contracts measles is infectious the day before the symptoms occur, and about four days before and after the rash appears. After the second day of the rash, there is minimal risk for infecting others. The period between exposure and the start of illness is about 10 days.

Measles is most severe in children who are malnourished, with the highest fatality rates occurring in malnourished children under the age of one. Measles is also more severe in adults than in children over ten years of age.

Potential complications include ear infections, diarrhoea, pneumonia, croup and convulsions.