
Measles

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus. The measles virus spreads easily and can cause serious complications to a person's health.

What are the symptoms of measles?

- Rash, AND
- Fever, AND
- Cough OR runny nose OR watery/red eyes.

Symptoms appear about eight to 12 days after a person is exposed to measles. The first symptom is usually fever. The rash usually appears two to three days after the fever begins and lasts five to six days. The rash begins at the hairline, moves to the face and upper neck, and then down the body.

How serious is measles?

Measles can be a serious disease that can lead to hospitalization and even death. Many people with measles have complications like diarrhea, ear infections, pneumonia, or acute encephalitis (a brain infection that can lead to permanent brain damage). Complications are more common in children under 5 years of age and adults older than 20.

Measles during pregnancy increases the risk of premature labor, miscarriage, and low birth weight infants. Measles can be especially severe in persons whose immune systems are weak.

How does measles spread?

Measles is spread through the air when people who have it breathe and cough. It is highly contagious. You cannot get measles more than once, because after you have had it, you are immune.

How long is a person with measles contagious?

A person with measles can pass it to others from four days before their rash appears to four days after it appears.

Is there a treatment for measles?

No, there is no specific treatment for measles. People with measles need bed rest, fluids, and control of fever. They may also need treatment for complications such as diarrhea, ear infection, or pneumonia.

Is there a vaccine for measles?

Yes. The measles vaccination is usually combined with mumps and rubella (MMR).

- Children get MMR doses at 12-15 months and at 4-6 years of age; the second MMR may be given as soon as a month after the first dose.
- Adults who have not had measles or the measles vaccine should receive one dose of the MMR vaccine, particularly if they were born in 1957 or later.
- Students (including college students), health care workers, and international travelers need to have received two doses of the MMR vaccine; if they have not, they should get vaccinated.

Who is immune to (protected against) measles?

- You are considered immune to measles if any one of the following is true:
 - You have at least one measles or MMR vaccine in your lifetime
 - You have been diagnosed with measles in the past
 - You have had a positive measles blood test at any time in your life
 - You have been told by a doctor that you are immune to measles
 - You were born before 1957
- People who are immune to measles are unlikely to get sick from measles. A small percentage of immune people may get sick, but the illness is typically mild.

If you have been exposed to measles, what should you do?

- If you are immune, it is unlikely you will get sick from measles, but not impossible. You can continue your normal activities. Keep an eye out for symptoms of measles for three weeks after your last exposure. If you develop symptoms, try to stay away from others.
- If you are not immune, you may develop measles infection
 - People who are not immune are asked to stay away from others (quarantine) until 3 weeks have passed since their last exposure in order to prevent further spread
 - If you have been exposed within the past 3 days, receiving an MMR vaccine can prevent infection.
- People with weakened immune systems, babies, and pregnant women who are not immune may need treatment within 6 days of exposure to prevent severe infection.
- If you develop symptoms consistent with measles and need to seek healthcare, please call the healthcare facility before arriving to prevent the spread of measles at the healthcare facility.