

MEASLES

What You Need to Know

What is measles?

Measles (also called rubeola) is a highly contagious virus that can cause serious health complications, especially in children younger than 5 years old, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems. About 1 in 5 people in the U.S. who get measles will be hospitalized.

Who can get measles?

Anyone who does not have immunity to measles can get measles. You have immunity through vaccinations or having recovered from measles.

How is measles spread?

The virus that causes measles lives in the nose and throat mucus of an infected person. It can spread to others through coughing and sneezing.

Measles virus can live for up to two hours in an airspace after an infected person leaves an area; if other people breathe the contaminated air or touch the infected surfaces and then touch their eyes, noses, or mouths, they can become infected. More than 90% of people who have not been vaccinated or have not had measles will develop measles after being exposed.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms usually begin 7-14 days after exposure but can appear as long as 21 days after exposure, and may include:

- High fever (may spike to over 104°F)
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Koplik spots: tiny white spots on the inner cheeks, gums, and roof of the mouth (develops 2-3 days after symptoms begin)
- Rash: Red, raised, and blotchy appearance and usually starts on the face and spreads to the trunk, arms, and legs (develops 3-5 days after symptoms begin)

How long is a person contagious with measles?

Infected people can spread measles to others from four days before through four days after the rash appears.

Are there complications from measles?

Ear infection and diarrhea are the most common complications of measles. People with weakened immune systems can develop pneumonia (an infection of the lungs), and pneumonia is the leading cause of death from measles in young children.

Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) is an uncommon, but serious complication of measles that can cause permanent brain damage or death.

During pregnancy measles infection may cause premature birth, low birth-weight, and fetal death.

How can I protect myself from measles?

Measles can be prevented with the MMR vaccine. The vaccine protects against three diseases: [measles](#), [mumps](#), and [rubella](#).

The MMR vaccine is safe and effective. It consists of two doses and is about 97% effective in preventing measles and protecting against it for life. Health care providers recommend that children receive the MMR vaccine between 12 and 15 months of age, and again between 4 and 6 years of age — before entering school. Talk to your health care provider if you're an adult and not sure if you need the measles vaccine.

I have been exposed to measles, what do I do?

- Unvaccinated individuals need to get vaccinated within 72 hours of exposure. If you do not have a record of two measles (MMR) vaccines, unsure if you have been vaccinated, or unsure if you have had measles in the past, contact your healthcare provider.
- Immune Globulin (Ig) treatment is effective within 6 days of exposure for high-risk individuals, including those who are unvaccinated or unsure about vaccination status, pregnant women and those with a weakened immune system due to illness and diseases like HIV, malnutrition, and/or medications.
- If symptoms develop, **call ahead before visiting your doctor or emergency room** so they can take precautions to prevent exposure to other individuals.
- Stay home if you are sick and don't allow visitors in your home, as measles is highly contagious.
- Watch for symptoms for 21 days after potential exposure. Call your healthcare provider if symptoms develop and inform them that you were exposed.

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