

Measles (Rubeola)

Questions and Answers

What is measles?

Measles (rubeola) is a highly contagious vaccine-preventable disease caused by a virus.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles typically begins with a fever, followed by cough, runny nose, and/or red, watery eyes. After 2-7 days, the fever peaks and a rash appears at the hairline and spreads progressively downward covering the face, neck, trunk, and extremities. The rash lasts 5-6 days, and fades in the same order it appears.

Who gets measles?

Children who have never received a measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine or who are not up-to-date on their MMR have the highest risk of contracting measles. Particularly, children less than 12 months of age, who are not old enough to receive MMR, and immunocompromised persons have an increased risk.

Can a child who had measles get measles again?

No. Permanent immunity is acquired after getting the disease.

What complications are associated with measles?

Complications from measles are more common among children less than 5 yrs. of age and adults 20 yrs. of age and older and are highest in infants, unimmunized pregnant women, and immunocompromised persons. Diarrhea, middle ear infection, and pneumonia are the most commonly reported complications. More severe, but less common complications include inflammation of the brain (encephalitis), seizures and death.

How is measles spread?

Measles is spread by air-borne droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

How long is a child with measles contagious?

A child with measles is contagious from four days before to four days after rash onset.

How long can a child have measles?

Generally, the fever resolves after 2 to 4 days, and the rash resolves in 5 to 6 days. The length of recovery depends on whether other complications are associated with the illness.

Is there a treatment for measles?

Treatment for measles is mainly supportive. Children with measles need bedrest, fluids, and control of fever. Children with complications need specific treatment and should be under the care of a physician.

Are there tests available to diagnose measles?

Yes. Your physician can perform tests to confirm the diagnoses of measles. Blood, urine and/or throat samples can be tested for measles. Results are most accurate if testing occurs during the beginning stages of the disease.

Is there a vaccine for measles?

Yes, a vaccine for measles is available. It is recommended that all children be routinely vaccinated between 12 and 18 months of age and receive a second dose between 4 and 6 yrs. of age.

If my child is exposed to measles, what should I do?

If you think your child has been exposed to measles contact your doctor immediately. If your child has not been vaccinated, measles vaccine may prevent disease if given within 3 days after exposure. Immune globulin (IG) may prevent or modify disease and provide temporary protection if given within 6 days of exposure in persons who cannot have the vaccine.

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Is it okay to take my child to public places (i.e. grocery store, daycare, playground)?

If your child has been diagnosed with measles you should avoid taking him or her to public places until the disease has resolved (approximately 4 days after rash onset). All contact with unimmunized children, immunocompromised persons and pregnant women should be avoided.

Note: Call your physician's office ahead of time to inform them that you are bringing in a child that has possibly been exposed to measles or has measles. This will allow the office to take precautions to assure no other children are exposed.

How can measles be prevented?

Routine vaccination is the best way to prevent measles. However, additional steps to prevent the spread of disease may include:

- Avoid close contact with others who are coughing or ill
- Wash hands often
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your sleeve