



Measles Frequently Asked Questions

What is measles?

Measles is a very contagious virus that causes an acute respiratory illness. Getting the measles vaccine is the best way to prevent getting and spreading measles.

Who is at risk for measles?

Anyone who is not vaccinated against measles is at risk. Measles can cause serious health complications in all age groups; however, some groups are at higher risk of experiencing severe complications from measles:

- Children younger than 5 years of age
- Adults older than 20 years of age
- Pregnant women
- People with weakened immune systems, such as from leukemia or HIV infection

How is measles spread?

Measles lives in the nose and throat mucus of an infected person and spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The measles virus can stay in the air or on surfaces for up to two hours after an infected person has left the room. If other people breathe the contaminated air or touch an infected surface and then touch their eyes, nose, or mouth, they become infected. Measles is highly contagious. If one person has it, up to 9 out of 10 people who come into close contact with that person will become infected if they are not protected.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Measles symptoms appear 7 to 14 days after contact with the virus.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles symptoms typically start with a high fever, cough, runny nose, and watery eyes. Tiny white spots called Koplik spots may appear inside the mouth. Then, a rash of red spots appears. The rash usually begins as flat, red spots on the face at the hairline and spreads down the neck to the body, arms, legs, and feet.

What should I do if I suspect measles?

People with measles symptoms should contact their healthcare provider immediately. **DO NOT** go to the doctor's office, the hospital, or a public health clinic without first calling to let them know about your symptoms. Healthcare providers who suspect measles should notify public health immediately.

How is measles diagnosed?

A healthcare professional diagnoses measles based on symptoms like high fever, Koplik spots in the mouth, and a rash. They confirm the diagnosis with laboratory tests such as a throat swab or a urine or blood test. The healthcare team may ask whether you or your child has had the measles vaccine, traveled to places where measles is spreading, or been around anyone with a rash or fever.

What is the treatment for measles?

There's no cure or specific treatment for measles; most people recover completely on their own. For uncomplicated cases, bed rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and over-the-counter medications to reduce the fever and headache may help make infected individuals more comfortable. Measles typically lasts about 7 to 10 days from the time early symptoms start until the rash fades, though full recovery and lingering fatigue can take a couple of weeks.

What are complications of measles?

A measles infection can cause severe illness and complications, such as diarrhea, ear infections, pneumonia, encephalitis (brain infection), seizures, and death. Measles during pregnancy increases the risk of severe maternal complications like pneumonia and adverse pregnancy outcomes such as miscarriage or preterm birth.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

People who actively have measles must isolate until four full days have passed after the rash first appears. Unvaccinated individuals exposed to measles must quarantine for 21 days from their last exposure.

What can be done to stop the spread of measles?

The MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine can prevent measles and rubella. The vaccine is safe and effective, and parents with questions about the vaccine or the vaccination schedule can consult their physician. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that children receive their first dose of MMR vaccine between 12 and 15 months of age and a second dose between 4 and 6 years of age. For babies aged 6-11 months traveling internationally, the CDC recommends a single dose of the MMR vaccine before travel, followed by two additional doses after their first birthday.

More than 95% of people who receive a single dose of MMR will develop immunity to all three viruses. A second dose boosts immunity, typically enhancing protection to 98%. People vaccinated with the MMR vaccine also help protect others who are too young or medically unable to be vaccinated.