

MEASLES QUESTIONS & ANSWERS: FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

What is measles?

Measles, also known as rubeola, is a highly contagious viral infection.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles typically begins with a fever, followed by cough, runny nose, sore throat and/or red, watery eyes. Two or three days after symptoms begin, tiny white spots may appear inside the mouth. Three to five days after symptoms begin a rash appears. The rash begins as flat red spots that appear on the face at the hairline and spread downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs, and feet. Small raised bumps may also appear on top of the flat red spots. The spots may become joined together as they spread from the head to the rest of the body. When the rash appears, a person's fever may spike to more than 104°F. After a few days, the fever subsides and the rash fades.

Is measles still common in the U.S.?

Measles was declared eliminated from the United States in 2000. This was possible thanks to a highly effective vaccination program and better measles control in the Americas. However, measles is still common in many other countries and may be brought into the U.S. by unvaccinated travelers. Keeping U.S. measles immunization levels high is critical to preventing measles outbreaks.

Who gets measles?

People 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 acquiring measles. Particularly, children less than 12 months of age, who are not old enough to receive MMR, and immunocompromised persons have an increased risk.

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, and through direct contact with respiratory secretions or items freshly soiled with these secretions. Airborne spread can also occur up to two hours after an infected person has occupied an enclosed area.

Can a person who had measles get measles again?

No. Permanent immunity is acquired after getting the disease.

How long is a person with measles contagious?

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

How long can a person 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.



How is measles treated?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Treatment for measles is mainly supportive. People with measles need bed rest, fluids, and control of fever. Children with complications need specific treatment and should be under the care of a physician.

What tests are available to diagnose measles?

A diagnosis of measles should be confirmed through laboratory testing by your physician, and reported to the health department right away. This requires the collection and testing of blood, urine and/or throat samples. Results are most accurate if testing occurs during the beginning stages of the disease.

Is there a vaccine for measles?

Yes. The measles vaccination is usually combined with mumps and rubella (MMR) or mumps, rubella, and varicella (MMRV)

- Children should receive two doses of MMR vaccine: the first at 12 to 15 months of age and the second at 4 to 6 years of age. (During a measles outbreak, children may receive the second dose as soon as four weeks after the first dose, no matter how old they are.)
- All adults who have not had measles or a measles shot should receive MMR vaccine, particularly if they were born in 1957 or later.
- Certain adults (such as healthcare workers) should receive two doses of measles/MMR vaccine to make sure they're protected.

My child has been 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.

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 keep your child at home and away from public places until the disease has resolved (approximately 4 days after rash onset). All contact with persons who lack measles immunity, are immunocompromised, or pregnant 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:

- Avoiding close contact with others who are coughing or ill
- Washing hands often
- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or cough and sneeze into your sleeve
- Stay home if ill
- Seek medical attention if measles-like symptoms develop