



Image Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

MEASLES

Measles, also known as rubeola or red measles, is a very serious infection caused by a virus (germ). It spreads easily from person-to-person. It usually affects children, but anyone who is not vaccinated or has not had past infection can become infected with measles.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MEASLES?

- Measles often starts with a fever, cough, runny nose, and red eyes
- Small bluish white spots (Koplik's spots) may appear inside the mouth
- A red, blotchy rash may appear on the face and then the rest of the body 3 to 5 days later

Symptoms start 7 to 21 days (usually 10 days) after you have been near someone with measles.

The rash will begin to fade after about a week.

Symptoms often last 7 to 14 days.

WHAT ARE POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS OF MEASLES?

Complications include:

- Ear infections
- Pneumonia (lung infection)
- Encephalitis (swelling/inflammation of the brain). This can lead to seizures, permanent brain damage, hearing loss or death.

HOW DOES MEASLES SPREAD?

Measles is very contagious and spreads easily from person-to-person.

Measles spreads through the air when a sick person coughs, sneezes, or breathes.

If you are not immune to measles (i.e., not vaccinated or have not had measles), you can become sick just by being in the same room with someone who has measles or where someone with measles has been recently.

The virus stays in the air and on surfaces for up to 2 hours after the infected person leaves.

HOW LONG IS MEASLES CONTAGIOUS?

A person with measles can spread the virus from 4 days before the rash starts (and one day before the first symptoms appear) until 4 days after the rash appears.

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WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU ARE EXPOSED TO MEASLES?

If you have been around someone with measles, call your health care provider right away. Let them know you have been around someone with measles.

Your health care provider will:

- Ask you to wear a mask when you are in the office
- Find out if you are immune to measles based on your vaccination record, age or by doing a blood test
- Offer to vaccinate you if you are not immune to measles and it is within 72 hours of exposure. This will help lower your risk of getting measles.

IMPORTANT

If you are not immune to measles OR your health care provider thinks that you have measles, you should stay away from day care, school, work and health care settings until your health care provider says that it is okay to return OR until 4 days after the rash appears.

WHAT IS THE RISK TO PREGNANT WOMEN?

Pregnant women who catch measles are at risk for more severe complications of the illness, as well as increased risk for preterm labor and preterm delivery.

HOW IS MEASLES TREATED?

There is no treatment for measles. Talk to your health care provider about ways to relieve sore throat, cough and fever.

Health care providers will give you treatment for complications from measles, such as ear infections and pneumonia.

HOW CAN MEASLES BE PREVENTED?

Get vaccinated. Immunization is the best way to prevent measles. The MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine protects against measles, mumps and rubella. Two doses of measles containing vaccine should be given.

The first dose of MMR vaccine should be given on or after the first birthday. The second dose should be given between 4-6 years of age as a combined MMR and chickenpox (varicella) vaccine, prior to starting school.

Adults born before 1970 can be presumed to have acquired natural immunity to measles.

Adults who are not immune and meet the following criteria, should talk to their health care provider about getting a dose of MMR vaccine. The vaccine should be offered to:

- Young adults (18-25 years)
- Post-secondary students
- Health care workers
- People who plan to travel to areas where measles is a concern

Measles vaccine should not be given to pregnant women.

REFERENCES

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