Measles
What You Need to Know

What is measles?

Measles is a respiratory illness with rash caused by the rubeola virus.

Who can get measles?

Anyone who has not been vaccinated for measles (MMR) or who has not had a confirmed case of measles can get measles. People born prior to 1956 likely have had measles. If exposed, approximately 90% of people who have not been vaccinated or previously had measles will develop the disease.

What are the symptoms of measles?

- Fever, feeling ill and loss of appetite (2-4 days before appearance of rash)
- Tiny white spots on the inner cheeks, gums, and roof of the mouth surrounded by redness (1-2 days before the appearance of rash)
- A rash that is red, raised, blotchy; usually starts on face, spreads to trunk, arms, and legs
- Sneezing or runny nose
- Watery or red eyes
- Hard, dry cough

How long after exposure do symptoms begin?

Symptoms usually begin 10-12 days after exposure, but can appear as long as 21 days after exposure.

How is measles spread?

Measles is easily spread by person-to-person contact and airborne spread of droplets from the nose, throat, and mouth through sneezing, coughing, and speaking.

How long is a person contagious?

Measles can be spread 5 days before developing the rash through 4 days afterward. Measles is highly contagious and spread through even minimal air exposure. A person can be infected with measles just by being in a room with an infected person, even up to 2 hours after the infected person has left.

Are there complications from measles?

Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) is an uncommon, but a serious complication of measles. A more common complication of measles is otitis media (ear infection) or pneumonia. During pregnancy, measles may cause loss of the unborn baby. Death due to measles is rare in the U.S.
Is there a treatment for measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Bed rest at home until at least 4 days after the appearance of the rash is necessary to not infect others.

How can measles be prevented?

- Measles is preventable by vaccination.
- Measles vaccine is a 2 dose series for children.
- All healthy children should be vaccinated at 12 - 15 months with the combination shot for measles, mumps, rubella (MMR).
- A 2nd MMR vaccine is usually given at 4 - 6 years of age. It can be given at any time as long as it is at least 4 weeks after the 1st dose.
- Some infants less than 12 months old should get a dose of MMR if they are traveling out of the country (this dose will not count toward their routine series) or are in an area with ongoing transmission.
- Adults born in 1957 or later should receive at least 1 dose of MMR vaccine unless they have other acceptable evidence of immunity. A second dose of MMR vaccine is needed for adults who may have been exposed to a case, or those who are students in colleges/universities, work in health care, or plan to travel internationally. Check with your health care provider to see if you need to be vaccinated.
- Pregnant women should not get vaccinated as this is a live viral vaccine. All women of childbearing age should avoid contact with those who have measles.
- Be sure to keep a record of all immunizations. Write down when the shots were received.

What if measles occurs at school or a day care center?

All cases must be reported to your local health department within 24 hours. People born after 1956 who cannot prove that they either have had:

1) Laboratory evidence of immunity to measles

OR

2) Measles vaccine after 12 months of age and a 2nd dose at least 4 weeks later, should get a measles vaccine. Otherwise, they will be excluded from school/day care until at least 21 days after the beginning of the last measles case.