



# Measles

## What is Measles?

Measles is a highly contagious (spreads very easily from person to person) disease caused by a virus that lives in the nose and throat mucus of an infected person.

## Who gets measles?

- Anyone who never had measles and has never been vaccinated.
- Babies younger than 12 months old, because they are too young to be vaccinated.
- Adults who were vaccinated before 1968, because some early vaccines did not give lasting protection.
- A very small percentage of vaccinated children and adults who may not have responded well to the vaccine

## How is it spread?

Measles spreads when a person infected with the measles virus breathes, coughs, or sneezes. Infected people can spread measles to others from four days before to four days after the rash appears.

Also, measles virus can live for up to two hours on a surface or in an airspace where the infected person coughed or sneezed. If other people breathe the contaminated air or touch the infected surface, then touch their eyes, noses, or mouths, they can become infected

Measles is a disease of humans; measles virus is not spread by any other animal species.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

The symptoms of measles generally appear about seven to 14 days after a person is infected.

The first symptoms are fever, tiredness, cough, runny nose, sore red eyes and feeling unwell. A few days later a rash appears. The rash starts on the face, spreads down to the body and lasts for 4-7 days. The rash is not itchy.

## Is measles serious?

Yes. Measles can cause diarrhea, ear infections and pneumonia. Deafness, blindness, seizure disorders and other brain diseases with measles are less common. Measles can also cause swelling of the brain and death, although this is rare.

Measles is most dangerous for babies and young children under 5 years of age, adults over 20 years of age, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems.

## Should a person with measles be isolated?

People with measles should be excluded from work, school or childcare centres for at least four days after the appearance of the rash.

People who have not been vaccinated against measles and those who have any condition that compromises their immune system and have been in contact with a person with measles should be excluded from work, school and childcare for 14 days from the day the rash appeared on the infected person.

## What type of treatment and care should be given?

If you suspect that you have measles call your healthcare provider. Because measles can look like other diseases that cause a rash, the only sure way to know if you have measles is to get a blood test. Sometimes tests will also be done on urine or a swab from your nose or throat.

If you have been exposed to someone with measles, talk to your doctor or nurse right away to see if you need a vaccination.

People with measles infection are normally advised to rest and drink plenty of fluids. There is no specific treatment, so treatment is directed at symptoms.

## How do I protect against measles?

The best way to protect against measles is to get the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine (called the MMR shot). There are now many fewer cases of these three diseases because children get the MMR vaccine. It is recommended that children get 2 doses of the MMR shot for best protection. Children will need one dose at each of the following ages:

- 12 through 15 months
- 4 through 6 years

Anyone born during or after 1966 and who has never had measles infection or measles vaccination should see their doctor to make sure that they have had two doses of measles containing vaccine at least four weeks apart.

## Is the MMR shot safe?

Yes. It is safe for most people. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. But most people who get the MMR shot do not have side effects. The most common side effects that do occur are usually very mild, such as a fever, rash, temporary pain or stiffness of the joints.

More severe problems, such as seizures, bleeding problems or allergic reactions are very rare. Getting MMR vaccine is much safer than getting measles.

## Where can I get the MMR shot?

The MMR vaccine is available at the Department of Health, Child health Clinic, 67 Victoria Street or at your physician's office.

## What should travellers do?

Because measles is more common in other parts of the world, people who travel to other countries should make sure that they are protected before traveling.

Adapted from:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Public health Fact Sheet: Measles Accessed 27 January 2015 from <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/cdc/factsheets/measles.pdf>

Measles. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014, Accessed 5 March 2014 from <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/measles/fs-parents.html>