

Measles (Rubeola)

What is measles?

Measles is an infection that causes a rash, fever, and cough. It is caused by the measles virus. Measles virus spreads very easily when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes. The best way to prevent getting sick with measles is by getting vaccinated with the Measles Mumps Rubella (MMR) vaccine.



What are the symptoms of measles?

Common symptoms include:

- Fever up to 104°F (40°C)
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Loss of appetite
- A red rash that starts on the face and spreads to the body
- Spots in the mouth that look like grains of salt

Other possible symptoms:

- Red, watery eyes or sensitivity to light
- Sneezing and coughing
- A sore throat
- Headache
- Chest pain
- Problems breathing

Most people start feeling better about 2 days after the rash starts. After 3 or 4 days, the rash starts to turn brown and goes away. The skin might peel or flake off, like after a sunburn. Many people have a cough for 1 or 2 weeks after the rash goes away.

How does measles spread?

Measles is spread when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes. Direct contact with fluids from the nose or mouth of an infected person can also spread the virus.

Symptoms of measles start about 8 to 12 days after having contact with the virus. The most obvious symptom is a rash all over the body. A person with measles can start spreading it about 5 days before they get a rash. It can still spread about 4 days after the rash is gone.

When should I call the doctor?

If you or your child have a fever and rash, or you spent time around someone with measles, call the doctor or nurse. They can answer questions and tell you what to do next. **Don't go to the doctor's office without calling first.** Measles spreads easily, so you could spread it to other people at the doctor's office.

What can I expect when in the hospital?

Patients with measles will be in rooms with special air filters. Air in these rooms is cleaned faster than other rooms to the virus from spreading. Hospital workers will clean their hands and put on special mask, eye protection, gown, and gloves when caring for anyone with measles.

Infection Prevention

Who is at risk for measles?

Any person who is not vaccinated (or who did not develop immunity after vaccination) can become infected.

People who are at risk for measles include:

- Children too young to get a measles vaccine
- Any person who did not get two measles vaccines
- People who got a vaccine that did not work well

An unvaccinated person's risk of getting measles goes up if they:

- Travel to countries where the measles vaccine is not common
- Spend time with an unvaccinated person who traveled to or is from one of these countries

The risk of measles also goes up if a lot of people do not get the vaccine. This causes more measles cases in some areas and can lead to outbreaks.

Can measles be prevented?

Yes. The MMR vaccine prevents infection. When healthy people get the vaccine, it protects people who can't get it. All children should get the MMR vaccine when they are 12 to 15 months old. Then, they need a second shot before they start school when they are 4 to 6 years old. Some people should wait or get tested before getting the MMR vaccine. This includes people with HIV or cancer and people taking certain medicines.

Some babies and children may need to get the MMR vaccine earlier if they:

- Live in an area where there is a measles outbreak
- Need to travel to an area where there is a measles outbreak
- Need to travel outside of the US

Some older children and adults may need to get the MMR vaccine if they are:

- Hospital or health care workers
- Students who don't have written proof of 2 doses of the MMR vaccine
- Traveling outside of the US

Adults who got a measles vaccine before 1968 should talk to their doctor or nurse.

What health effects can measles cause?

Measles can cause long-term problems with the lungs, ears, or brain. These problems can be dangerous as some can cause death. Some people have a higher risk of serious problems from measles. This includes anyone who:

- Has HIV or cancer
- Is pregnant
- Does not get enough food or vitamins
- Is under 2 years old
- Is very old

Is there a test for measles?

Yes. There is a blood test that can diagnose measles. However, medical professionals can tell if a person has measles by doing a physical exam and asking about symptoms

How is measles treated?

For most people, there is no specific treatment. If you or your child have measles, you can:

- Rest
- Drink lots of fluids
- Take acetaminophen (sample brand name: Tylenol) to help with fever and aches

Do not give aspirin or medicines that have aspirin to children younger than 18. This is because aspirin can cause a serious problem called Reye syndrome.

Sometimes vitamin A is given to children with measles. If your child needs treatment in the hospital, or has another health condition besides measles, the doctor might order vitamin A.

If measles causes other health problems, such as ear infections, doctors can usually treat them.

Does the MMR vaccine cause autism?

No. After doing many careful studies, scientists have **not** found any link between the MMR vaccine and autism. Many years ago, 1 study said that there was a link between autism and vaccines. But that study was false.

I am pregnant, what happens if I get measles?

Getting measles when you are pregnant could cause pregnancy loss (a miscarriage). This is when a pregnancy ends before a person has been pregnant for 20 weeks. Or the baby could be born too early. Babies who are born early can have serious life-long health problems. You must get the MMR vaccine before pregnancy. It is not safe during pregnancy. After you get the vaccine, wait at least 4 weeks before trying to get pregnant.

Who should I talk to if I have questions?

For more information on measles, visit the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website

<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html>. Please talk to your doctor to get more information on what to expect and next steps when leaving the hospital.