

# FACT SHEET: MEASLES

October 2023

## What is measles?

**Measles** is a **highly contagious** infection caused by the measles virus. The virus enters the body through the nose and throat and then spreads everywhere, causing a **rash**. It can cause serious complications and death, especially in children, which makes it very important to vaccinate against measles.

## Can I get measles?

If you have neither received the **full vaccine series** or had measles before, you are not immune to the measles. Every year, still cases of measles in the US, most often related to **foreign tourists** bringing it in and passing it on.

## What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms of measles begin with a **high fever**, often above 104°F (40 °C) followed by **cough, runny nose** (coryza) and **eye redness (conjunctivitis)**. A red blotchy **rash** appears about 4 days after the start of the fever **beginning at the hairline, then involving the face** and upper neck, and proceeding downward and outwards to hands and feet. After 5 to 6 days, the rash fades in the same order that it appears. In addition to these usual symptoms, there can be serious complications of measles such as diarrhea, otitis media, pneumonia, encephalitis, subacute sclerosing panencephalitis, and death.

## How does measles spread?

Measles is **highly contagious**. About 90% of the people who have not been vaccinated and are exposed to someone with measles will become infected. Infected people can spread measles by **coughing, sneezing, talking, or breathing** starting about 4 days before their rash appears to 4 days afterwards. The measles virus can also live for up to **two hours** in the air where the infected person coughed or sneezed, even after they leave the area. If other people breathe the contaminated air or touch the infected surface, then touch their eyes, noses, or mouths, they can become infected. Spread of measles is particularly common in certain settings, such as households, daycares, and schools. It usually takes about **2 weeks** after exposure to a person infected with measles before symptoms start.

## How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Measles symptoms appear 7 to 14 days after contact with the virus. The average incubation period for measles is 11-12 days, and the time from exposure to rash onset is 14 days, with a range of 7-21 days.

## How long can an infected person carry measles?

Infected people are usually contagious starting about 4 days before their rash appears to 4 days afterwards. Approximately 90% of non-immune individuals exposed to an infected person will become infected.

## How is measles treated?

There is no specific treatment for the virus, though medications are available to decrease the severity of some symptoms. If you think you may have measles, call your health care provider **before** your visit to tell them about your symptoms.

## Should I stay home from work or school if I have measles?

**Yes.** A person with measles should **remain home** from work, school, or daycare until the **fourth day** of the rash.

## Is there a vaccine for measles?

**Yes!** The measles vaccine has been combined with the mumps and rubella vaccines into a single vaccine known as **MMR[MMRII]** vaccine and measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella vaccine, **MMRV [ProQuad]**. The MMR vaccine provides protection against all three diseases. Consult with your health care provider to determine if you should receive the vaccine. Most children should receive **2 doses** of MMR vaccine through the **routine childhood vaccination schedule**. Some of the factors that can affect whether the vaccine is recommended include age, occupation, travel plans, and health conditions. Measles remains a common disease in many parts of the world, and some U.S. travelers have become sick with measles after traveling abroad. Before you travel, consult with a healthcare provider to make sure you and your family are protected.

## Is it true that the vaccine can cause autism?

No. Current medical research demonstrates that measles vaccination is safe and effective. Should a person with measles be excluded from work or school? A person diagnosed with measles should remain home for 5 days after the rash first appeared.

## Want more information?

Information about measles and other related health topics can be found at the [website cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov). The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit [dchealth.dc.gov](https://dchealth.dc.gov) or call (844) 493-2652

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