

# Measles

Measles is a viral infection that spreads very easily.

Get the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine to avoid getting measles. Do not get the vaccine if you are pregnant.

[MMR vaccine](#)

## Check if you or your child has measles

Measles starts with cold-like symptoms around 10 days after you get infected.

The first symptoms of measles are:

- cold-like symptoms such as aches and pains, a runny nose, sneezing and a cough
- sore, red eyes that may be sensitive to light
- [a temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or above \(fever\)](#)
- small grey-white spots in your mouth
- loss of appetite
- tiredness, irritability and a general lack of energy

You get a measles rash a few days later.

## Small grey-white spots in your mouth

Not everyone with measles has these spots. The spots usually appear before the measles rash. If you have these spots and other symptoms or a rash, it's very likely you have measles.

The spots usually last for a few days.



Spots in mouth

## The measles rash

The rash appears around 2 to 4 days after your first symptoms. It fades after around a week.

It usually starts on your head or neck and then spreads outwards to the rest of your body.

The rash can be flat or slightly raised and join together into large blotchy patches. It looks brown or red on white skin. It may be harder to see on brown and black skin.



The spots of the measles rash are sometimes raised and join together to form blotchy patches.

The rash is slightly itchy for some people. You will feel most ill on the first or second day after you get the rash.

### Contact your GP or maternity hospital urgently if you:

- are pregnant and you think you might have measles
- think you or your child has measles
- were in close contact with someone who has measles and you are pregnant
- were in close contact with someone who has measles and you did not have measles in the past or 2 doses of the MMR vaccine

Call before you go to your GP or hospital. They may need to make arrangements to reduce the risk of spreading the infection.

### If you're not sure it's measles

You're unlikely to have measles if you had:

- 2 doses of the MMR vaccine
- measles in the past

The measles rash may look like other childhood conditions, such as roseola, rubella or [slapped cheek syndrome](#).

### [Types of rashes](#)

## How to treat measles

Measles usually lasts 7 to 10 days.

To ease your symptoms:

- take paracetamol or ibuprofen for the fever, aches and pains - do not give aspirin to children under 16 years old
- drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration
- close the curtains to lower your sensitivity to light
- use damp cotton wool to clean under you or your child's eyes

In severe cases, you or your child may need to go to hospital for treatment.

**Call 112 or 999 or go to your nearest emergency department (ED) if**

you or your child has measles and:

- [shortness of breath](#)
- a sharp chest pain that feels worse with breathing
- cough up blood
- are drowsy
- confusion
- fits (convulsions)

These symptoms may be a sign of a serious bacterial infection.

Tell the operator that you have measles or call before you go to an ED. The hospital may need to make arrangements to reduce the risk of spreading the infection.

## How to avoid spreading measles

Measles spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes. There are things you can do to reduce the risk of spreading it.

Tell your child's school or childcare if your child has measles. Children in your child's group or class may need to get the MMR vaccine.

Do not go to work, school or childcare until at least 4 days after you first got

the measles rash.

Avoid contact with young children, pregnant women and people who have a weak immune system.

## How to avoid getting measles

When you get measles, your body builds up immunity to the virus. It's very unlikely you'll get measles again.

### Measles vaccine (MMR)

You or your child can avoid getting measles by having the MMR vaccine. The MMR vaccine is offered to all children in Ireland. You get 2 doses.

[About the MMR vaccine and where to get it](#)

## If you were in close contact with someone who has measles

If you were in close contact with someone who has measles, call your GP for advice.

They can tell you about treatment to reduce your risk of developing measles. This can include an MMR vaccine or human normal immunoglobulin (HNIG).

Most people do not need HNIG. Your doctor can tell you if this treatment is recommended for you.

It may be recommended for:

- babies under age 6 months
- pregnant women who did not have 2 doses of the MMR vaccine or measles in the past
- people with weak immune systems - for example people living with HIV or having treatment with chemotherapy or radiotherapy

HNIG should be given within 6 days of exposure.

## Complications of measles

Measles usually passes without causing any serious problems.

Common problems that can be caused by measles include:

- [diarrhoea and vomiting](#)
- a [middle ear infection](#)
- [conjunctivitis](#)
- inflammation of your voice box (laryngitis)
- infections of your airways and lungs, such as [pneumonia](#)
- fits caused by a fever ([febrile seizures](#))

Measles can lead to serious problems if it spreads to other parts of the body, such as the lungs or brain.

Rare problems that can be caused by measles include:

- inflammation of your liver ([hepatitis](#))
- eye disorders and vision loss
- [meningitis](#)
- a brain infection
- heart and nervous system problems

Some people are more at risk of having problems because of measles.

These include:

- babies under 1 year
- children with a poor diet
- people with a weak immune system, such as those with leukaemia
- teenagers and adults

Children who are older than 1 year have the lowest risk of having problems because of measles.

## Measles in pregnancy

If you get measles when you're pregnant and you're not immune to it, it could harm your baby.

It can cause:

- miscarriage or stillbirth
- premature birth
- low birth weight

### Call your GP or maternity hospital urgently if

you are pregnant and you:

- think you were in contact with someone who has measles

They can tell you about treatment to reduce your risk of developing measles.

Call before you go to your GP or hospital. They may need to make arrangements to reduce the risk of spreading the infection.

# Sláintecare.

This project has received funding from the Government of Ireland's Sláintecare Integration Fund 2019 under Grant Agreement Number 8.

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