

FACT SHEET

Measles

What is Measles?

Measles (rubeola) is a serious respiratory disease that causes a rash and fever. It is very contagious and is caused by a virus. Measles can have serious complications such as ear infections, encephalitis, and in rare cases death. Measles is preventable by vaccine. Persons who have not had the disease and have not been immunized are susceptible.

How is it spread?

Measles virus lives in the nose and throat mucus of an infected person and is spread through direct and indirect contact by airborne droplets caused by sneezing, coughing, and speaking. Measles can be spread through even minimal air exposure. A person can be infected with measles just by being in the same room with an infected person, even up to 2 hours after the infected person has left. Infection can also occur after touching a contaminated surface and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment and no cure for measles, only treatment of symptoms. If you have been exposed or if symptoms develop, do not visit your doctor or emergency room, unless you call ahead so they can take precautions to prevent exposure to others. Stay home if you are sick.

What are the symptoms?

- High fever (may spike to more than 104 °F)
- Runny nose (coryza)
- Red, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Cough
- Koplik spots (tiny white spots) inside the mouth (2-3 days after symptoms begin)
- Rash consisting of flat red spots on face at the hairline spreading down to neck, trunk, arms, legs, and feet (3-5 days after symptoms begin)

Symptoms usually begin 7-14 days after exposure but can appear as long as 21 days after exposure. A person is considered contagious as early as four days before developing a rash through four days after the rash appears.

How is it prevented?

Measles is preventable by vaccine. If you have been vaccinated with two appropriately timed MMR vaccines or have had a confirmed case of measles, you are considered protected. In addition, persons born prior to 1957 and those with lab-confirmed immunity are considered protected. Unvaccinated individuals that get vaccinated within 72 hours of exposure may be protected.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.

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