

FACT SHEET: MEASLES (Rubeola)

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WHAT IS MEASLES?

Measles, (rubeola), 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. Therefore, the two-dose of measles-containing vaccine is 97 percent effective in preventing measles infection.

WHO IS AT THE HIGHEST RISK FOR CONTRACTING MEASLES

People who have not received the full course of measles vaccination or have not been vaccinated at all are at risk of contracting the disease.

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 (ear infection), pneumonia, encephalitis, subacute sclerosing panencephalitis (rare brain disorder), and death.

HOW DOES MEASLES SPREAD?

Measles is highly contagious. About 90% of 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 until 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, nose, or mouth, they can become infected. The spread of measles is particularly common in households, daycares, and schools. It usually takes about 2 weeks after exposure for a person infected with measles to start showing symptoms.

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 healthcare 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. Patients with a weakened immune system may spread the virus for the duration of their illness.

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 the measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella vaccine, MMRV. The MMR vaccine provides protection against all three diseases. Consult with your healthcare provider to determine if you should receive the vaccine. Most children should receive 2 doses of MMR vaccine through the routine childhood vaccination schedule. The vaccine is preventative if administered within 3 days of exposure to the measles virus. People born before 1957 are considered to have presumptive evidence of immunity.

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.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Information about measles and other related health topics can be found at [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 or call (202) 442-5865.