

Measles

What is measles?

Measles is an illness caused by a virus. Measles is highly contagious (easily spread from one person to another). Complications may include middle ear infections, pneumonia and encephalitis (swelling of the brain). Some cases can lead to death.

How do I get measles?

Measles is spread by breathing in droplets of an infected person's cough or sneeze. These droplets can remain in the air for up to two hours, even if the infected person is no longer in the room.

Symptoms

Symptoms usually appear within 7-18 days after being exposed to an infected person. Early in the illness, some people may not experience any symptoms, but will still be able to spread the virus to others. Symptoms occur in two stages.

The first stage may last 3-4 days. Symptoms include:

- Fever over 101°F
- Runny nose
- Red eyes that are sensitive to light
- Cough

Second stage symptoms begin about 4 days after the first symptoms appear and may last for 4-7 days. Symptoms include:

- A blotchy red rash that fades to brown before going away.
- The rash usually begins along the hairline and on the neck, then spreads downward.

How long is an infected person contagious (able to spread the disease)?

An infected person can spread the virus to others for 3-4 days before the rash appears and for up to 4 days after the rash first appears.

Prevention

Immunization is the only effective way to prevent Measles:

- Immunize adults and children with the MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) vaccine (full immunization requires two doses of the vaccine).
- Follow the Childhood Immunization Schedule. (Ask your health care provider or local health department for a copy.)
- If you are exposed to measles and have NOT received two doses of the measles vaccine, get the measles vaccine (or MMR vaccine) immediately. If the vaccine is given within 72 hours of being exposed to the measles virus, it can prevent the illness.

Treatment for measles

- People who develop red, sensitive eyes combined with a fever and a rash, should see their health care provider immediately. **DO NOT ENTER A MEDICAL OFFICE, CLINIC OR HOSPITAL WITHOUT CALLING FIRST.** Measles can be very dangerous for infants who are too young to be immunized, immuno-compromised people and people who have not been immunized against measles.
- If you have measles or have been exposed to measles and have not been fully immunized against the virus, contact your local health department or health care provider to find out if it is safe for you to go to school, child care settings, or work. Infected people can spread the virus to others, even if they do not feel sick.
- There is no specific treatment for measles. Most people will fully recover without complications.