

About...Measles

What is measles?

Measles is a viral rash illness that is very contagious. It is now rare in the United States but is still common in some countries. Measles may cause serious complications, including ear infection, pneumonia, and encephalitis (brain swelling). In some cases, measles may be fatal, especially in children under 5 years of age.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms begin with:

- runny nose
- cough
- drowsiness
- loss of appetite
- fever
- spots that may occur inside the mouth (Koplik's spots)
- increased sensitivity to light

About the fourth day, the fever usually increases, and a blotchy red (maculopapular) rash appears on the face and spreads to the rest of the body. The rash lasts about 4 or 5 days, then gradually fades.

How is measles spread?

Measles is spread by contact with the nose or throat secretions of an infected person. This can happen when someone coughs or sneezes near someone else or someone touches objects contaminated with nose or throat drainage. Measles is extremely contagious, and virus particles can remain viable in the air up to two hours.

How do I know if I have measles?

See your health care provider right away. If you have been exposed to someone with measles or you have symptoms that match those described above, your health care provider may test you for measles. Many other organisms can cause rash illnesses. If you have been vaccinated for measles, it is very unlikely that you have the disease.

How is measles treated?

Since measles is caused by a virus, antibiotics are not effective. Currently, there are no antiviral medications used to treat measles. Treatment focuses on relieving the symptoms of the illness.

How can measles be prevented?

The measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine is safe and effective for preventing measles infection. Most schools and licensed child-care providers require proof of vaccination or immunity to measles before entry. If you have not had measles and/or have no record of having the MMR vaccine, see your health care provider to decide if you should receive the vaccine. Two doses of vaccine normally provide lifelong immunity.

For additional information on measles, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site at: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/measles/default.htm>

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