



Fact Sheet: Measles

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used 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.

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory virus that causes a febrile maculopapular rash illness. Humans are the only natural hosts of the measles virus. In rare cases, it can be deadly.

How does measles spread?

Measles is one of the most contagious of all infectious diseases with up to 9 out of 10 susceptible persons with close contact to a measles patient developing measles. The virus is transmitted by direct contact with infectious droplets or by airborne spread when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes. Measles virus can remain infectious in the air up to two hours after an infected person leaves an area. People can transmit the virus four days before the rash starts and four days after the rash appears. This illness is more common in late winter and early spring.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles symptoms appear 7-14 days after contact with the virus and typically starts with a very high fever, cough, runny nose, and watery eyes. A rash appears three to five days after the first symptoms.

Some of the other symptoms that may occur are:

- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red eyes
- Ear infection
- Pneumonia
- Diarrhea
- Rash of tiny red spots that start on the face & spread to the rest of the body

How is measles treated?

There is no specific medicine to cure measles. If a person develops symptoms, they should consult their health care provider for the diagnostic testing to confirm diagnosis of the measles virus.

People should:

- Get plenty of rest
- Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration
- The sick person should stay at home for 4 days after the appearance of the rash

- Wash your hands often with soap and water
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and put used tissue in the trash can. If a tissue is unavailable, use the upper sleeve or elbow to cough or sneeze into, not your hands
- Avoid sharing drinks and/or eating utensils
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces, toys, doorknobs, tables and contours. Standard household disinfectants will readily kill the measles virus

How is measles prevented?

The best way to prevent measles is to be vaccinated against it. The vaccine is given in combination with the mumps and rubella vaccines, known as MMR vaccine. Two (2) MMR injections are needed to be completely immunized.

Teenagers and adults who do not know if they are protected against measles should ask their doctor or clinic about the MMR vaccine.

Pregnant women should not receive the live vaccine—and all women of childbearing age should avoid anyone with measles