



## Department of Health

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## Measles

### What is Measles?

Measles is a very contagious disease of the nose, throat and lungs that is caused by a virus.

### What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of measles usually begin about 7-14 days after a person is infected.

- A typical case of measles begins with fever, cough, runny nose, red eyes, and sore throat.
- Two or three days after symptoms begin, tiny white spots may appear inside the mouth.
- A few days later, a red or reddish-brown rash appears. The rash usually begins on a person's face at the hairline and spreads down to the neck, trunk, arms, legs, and feet. When the rash appears, a person's fever may spike to more than 104 degrees.
- After a few more days, the fever begins to go away and the rash fades.

### How is measles spread?

Measles spreads through the air when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes. **It is so contagious that anyone who is exposed to it and is not immune will probably get the disease.** A person with measles can spread the illness to others from 4 days before until 4 days after the rash appears.

The measles virus can live on surfaces for up to 2 hours. A person can also become infected by touching an object that has the virus on it, and then putting their fingers in their mouth or nose.

### How serious is measles?

In about 1 of 3 people who are infected with measles, the illness will be serious.

- Pneumonia can develop and cause death in young children.
- Ear infections can occur and may cause permanent hearing loss.
- Encephalitis (swelling of the brain) can develop.
- Measles can also make a pregnant woman have a miscarriage or give birth prematurely.

These complications are more common among children under 5 years of age and adults over 20 years.

### How is measles treated?

Nothing can get rid of measles infection, but over-the-counter medicines may be used to reduce fever. Do not give aspirin to children because of risk of Reye's syndrome, which can cause death.

If a bacterial infection such as pneumonia or ear infection develops while you or your child has measles, your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic.

### Can measles be prevented?

**Measles can be prevented by the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine.**

Thanks to vaccination, for the past several decades there have not been many cases of measles in the United States. However as the number of unvaccinated people has increased in recent years, more cases of measles are being seen. Vaccination is the key to keeping you and your family safe from this serious disease.

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