

Measles FAQ

What is measles?

Measles is very contagious and can cause serious illness. Measles is caused by a virus and spreads very easily when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes. Measles spreads so easily that anyone who is exposed and not immune (either by being immunized or having had measles in the past) will likely get it.

What are the symptoms of measles?

- Fever
- Runny nose
- Cough
- Pink eye (red, watery eyes)
- Rash all over the body starting on the face and spreading throughout the body

People can spread measles before they show symptoms. Symptoms usually last 7-10 days.

How is measles diagnosed?

Measles is diagnosed by a combination of the patient's symptoms and by laboratory tests.

When do symptoms start?

It takes an average of 10–12 days from exposure to the first symptom, which is usually fever. The measles rash doesn't usually appear until approximately 14 days after exposure, 2–3 days after the fever begins.

How is measles prevented?

The measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine is very safe, effective and the best protection against measles. Two doses of MMR vaccine are about 97% effective at preventing measles. One dose is about 93% effective.

How serious is measles?

Measles can be a serious disease, with 30% of reported cases experiencing one or more complications. Death from measles occurs in 2 to 3 per 1,000 reported cases in the United States. Complications from measles are more common among very young children (younger than five years), adults (older than 20 years), pregnant people, and people with weakened immune systems.

What are possible complications from measles?

Diarrhea is the most common complication of measles (occurring in 8% of cases), especially in young children. Ear infections occur in 7% of reported cases. Pneumonia, occurring in 6% of reported cases, accounts for 60% of measles-related deaths. About 1 out of 1,000 cases will develop acute encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain. This serious complication can lead to permanent brain damage. Measles during pregnancy increases the risk of premature labor, miscarriage, and low-birth-weight infants, although birth defects have not been linked to measles exposure.

Measles can be especially severe in persons with compromised immune systems. Measles is more severe in malnourished children, particularly those with vitamin A deficiency. In developing countries, the fatality rate may be as high as 25%.

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Should pregnant people get the measles vaccine (MMR)?

Pregnant people should not get the MMR vaccine. Pregnant people who need the vaccine should wait until after giving birth. People should avoid getting pregnant for four weeks after getting the MMR vaccine.

Is the measles vaccine safe?

Research has shown that the MMR vaccine is safe and very effective. Getting vaccinated is much safer than getting any of the diseases the vaccine protects against.

Are there side effects from the vaccine?

Like any medication, the MMR vaccine may cause side effects, most of which are mild and short-lasting:

- Pain at the injection site
- Fever
- Mild rash
- Swollen glands in the cheek or neck

Does the MMR vaccine cause autism?

Vaccines do not cause autism. In fact, studies have shown that there is no link between receiving vaccines and developing autism. Scientists have carefully studied the MMR shot and no studies have found a link between autism and the MMR vaccine.

What is isolation?

Isolation separates people who are sick with a contagious disease from people who are not sick to prevent further spread of disease. People who have measles infection, or who are suspected of having measles infection, must be isolated until 4 days after their rash appeared to prevent infecting other people. Isolation is an important part of stopping measles spreading in the community, especially to high-risk people.

What is quarantine?

Quarantine means staying at home and away from daycare/school/work, group and social activities, sports and recreation events and public places like cinemas and shopping malls. Quarantine separates people who were exposed to a contagious disease and are in the time period where they could still get sick from it. People who were exposed to measles may spread measles to others even before they have symptoms themselves. Quarantine helps prevent measles from spreading in the community. For measles, quarantine is 21 - 28 days from exposure to a person with measles.



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Is school exclusion the same as quarantine?

No. The processes of quarantine and school exclusion are different and administered separately.

Quarantine is issued by the local health department and is a requirement that separates and restricts the movement of people, of any age, who were exposed to a contagious disease and are in the period where they could still get sick from it. Public health authorities help determine the need for quarantine and the appropriate dates. For measles, quarantine is 21-28 days from exposure to a person with measles.

School Exclusion is a State of Ohio rule that applies to School Districts that requires their individual K-12 schools to exclude unvaccinated students from school for 21 days from the last reported case of measles in that school. The exclusion period is done for the protection of the unvaccinated student, is required by the State of Ohio, and is not optional for the school or the students. School exclusion does not apply to vaccinated staff or faculty, but the quarantine period does apply. It should be noted that if there are multiple cases of the measles at a particular school, the student's exclusion might be significantly extended beyond 21 days, since the 21-day time period would reset with the identification of each individual new case. When a student is excluded from school, this exclusion also includes all before and after school activities including childcare, clubs, and sports.

What should I do if I'm unsure whether I'm immune to measles?

If you're unsure whether you're immune to measles, you should first try to find your vaccination records or documentation of measles immunity. If you are not able to locate your records, you may receive a dose of MMR if you are not currently required to quarantine and do not have a contraindication to vaccination with a live virus vaccine (such as pregnancy or a severe immune disorder). Another option is to have a doctor test your blood to determine whether you're immune, but this option is likely to cost more and it may take some time to get the result.

How can I locate my immunization records?

Contact your health care provider regarding your past immunization history. Schools, colleges, prior employers, or the military (if you were enlisted) may also have records of your immunization history. If you are, or have been, pregnant your obstetrician's office may have also tested you for immunity to measles when they tested you for immunity to rubella. You may also be included in your state's immunization registry, and can contact your local health department to request a record. Please visit the CDC website for additional suggestions on how to locate your vaccination records:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines-adults/recommended-vaccines/keeping-vaccine-records-up-to-date.html>

Can someone get measles more than once?

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Who needs the measles vaccine (MMR)?

Children should routinely receive two doses of MMR:

- first dose at age 12 through 15 months and
- the second dose at 4-6 years of age or at least 28 days following the first dose.

Adults born in 1957 or later, who do not have evidence of immunity against measles should get at least one dose of MMR vaccine. These adults only need a second dose if they fall into one of the groups below:

- Traveling internationally or within the United States with active community-wide transmission
- College student
- Healthcare worker

Adults born before 1957 have presumptive immunity, meaning they likely had measles or were exposed as a child, therefore, MMR vaccination is not recommended (unless they are a healthcare worker). These adults should contact their physician if they are unsure if they had measles as a child, or they have questions about whether they should get one dose of the MMR vaccine.

Travelers - People 6 months of age or older who will be traveling internationally or within the United States to areas with an active, ongoing measles outbreak should be protected against measles. If you have travel plans and questions, you may contact Henry County Health Department at 419-599-5545 and ask to speak to a public health nurse about travel vaccines.

Who is at risk of measles?

Anyone who has not been immunized or had measles in the past is at risk. Babies younger than 12 months are at risk because they are too young to have been vaccinated.

How do I protect my baby who is under 12 months old?

During the first few months of life, newborns have some natural immunity from their mothers, if the mother was vaccinated. If parents or caregivers have not gotten the MMR vaccine or had measles in the past, they should get vaccinated. It is important to make sure people who are around your new baby do not expose your baby to measles.

An early dose of MMR vaccine for infants aged 6-11 months who live in or are traveling to an outbreak area (internationally and within the U.S) should receive one dose of the MMR vaccine, as infants younger than 12 months of age are at greatest risk of severe illness.

Infants who receive one dose of MMR vaccine before their first birthday should receive two more doses according to the routinely recommended schedule.

What if someone in my family has measles?

They should stay isolated from you and others for 4 days after their rash first appeared. It is best to limit contact with others in your household and all family members should review their immune status.

Is there a treatment for measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles. People with measles need bed rest, fluids, and control of fever. Patients with complications may need treatment specific to their problem.

How long is a person with measles contagious?

Measles is highly contagious and can be transmitted from 4 days before the rash becomes visible to 4 days after the rash appears.