

Measles

Fact Sheet

What is it?

Measles is a serious and very contagious viral respiratory illness.

Symptoms

A typical case of measles begins with mild to moderated fever, cough, runny nose, red eyes, and sore throat. Two or three days after symptoms begin, tiny white spots (Koplik's spots) may appear inside the mouth. About 4 days after the initial symptoms, a red or reddish-brown rash appears. The rash usually begins on a person's face at the hairline and spreads downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs and feet. When the rash appears the person may experience a very high fever.

What are the complications associated with measles?

Measles can cause severe illness and complications, such as diarrhea, ear infections, pneumonia, encephalitis, seizures and death. These complications are more common among children under 5 years of age and adults over 20 years of age. Measles during pregnancy increases the risk of miscarriage or premature births.

How is it spread?

The virus lives in the mucus in the nose and throat of infected people. When people infected with measles cough, sneeze, breathe or talk droplets spray into the air and remain active and contagious for up to two hours. For this reason, measles is highly contagious and is easily spread.

A person can spread measles from up to 4 days before until 4 days after the rash begins.

Anyone born after January 1, 1957 who has not had measles or has not been vaccinated is susceptible to measles.

How long does it take to show signs of measles after being exposed?

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

Diagnosis

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

Is there a treatment for measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles. People with measles need bed rest, fluids, and control of fever. There may be additional treatment if complications develop.

Are there vaccines for measles?

Yes. Measles vaccine is usually combined with mumps and rubella in the MMR vaccine.

- Children should receive two doses of MMR vaccine; the first at age 12-15 months and the second at age 4-6 years.
- Adults born before January 1, 1957 are assumed to be immune to measles. Other adults (except for pregnant women) who have not had measles or been vaccinated are at risk and should get at least one dose of MMR vaccine. Pregnant women should not be vaccinated until after delivery.
- Certain adults (such as healthcare workers, international travelers, or adults attending post high school educational institutions) should receive two doses of MMR vaccine.

Can someone get measles more than once?

No. Very rarely some individuals have had a second measles illness. Usually after a measles illness, a person has lifelong immunity.

What can be done to prevent the spread of measles?

- Protect your children by having them vaccinated.
- Protect yourself by making sure you have immunity to measles.
- If you think you might have been exposed to measles and need to seek healthcare, call your doctor in advance so that you don't have to sit in a waiting room and possibly expose other patients.

For more information about measles, please contact your health care provider or Clark County Public Health at (360) 397-8182.

<http://www.clark.wa.gov/public-health/diseases/index.html>



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