



Fact Sheet

Measles

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. Measles is most common in late winter and spring.

Who gets measles?

The measles virus can infect any person of any age who has not previously had the disease or the measles vaccine.

How is measles spread?

The infection is highly contagious and spread by airborne droplets and by direct contact with nose or throat secretions of infected persons.

How common is measles?

Before the vaccine was licensed in 1963, there were an estimated 3-4 million cases of measles every year. Widespread use of the measles vaccine in the United States makes it very rare in this country. There can occasionally be outbreaks among visitors to the United States and travelers returning from other countries. New cases continue to be reported, primarily in populations that have refused vaccination for religious or personal belief reasons.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms start about 10-12 days after being exposed to the measles and last from one to two weeks. The illness begins with a runny nose, watery eyes, cough, and high fever. After two to three days, tiny white spots may appear on the inner cheeks, gums, and roof of mouth, surrounded by redness. Approximately 14 days after exposure, or two to four days after symptoms appear, a raised, red rash starts on the face and spreads down the body and out to the arms and legs. The rash usually lasts five to six days. A person is contagious from about 4 days before the rash starts until 4 days after the rash develops.

What is the treatment for measles?

There is no specific treatment or medicine to cure measles. Bed rest, increased fluids, cool or warm compresses, and fever-reducing medicine can be used to reduce fever and discomfort. The sick person should stay at home until four days after the appearance of the rash.

Are there complications from measles?

Complications can occur, such as diarrhea, ear infections, or pneumonia. These complications are more common among children under 5 years of age and adults over 20 years old. One out of 1,000 people infected will develop encephalitis (inflammation of the brain that can result in deafness or mental retardation) and about one out of 1,000 will die. Measles during pregnancy increases the risk of premature labor, miscarriage, and low-birth-weight infants.

How can measles be prevented?

Routine immunizations with 2 doses of measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine (MMR) can provide up to 99% immunity. The first dose is recommended at 12 months of age and the second dose before entering school, around 4 - 6 years of age. The two doses of vaccine normally provide lifelong immunity.

What should be done if someone is exposed to measles?

Notification of the exposure should be communicated to a doctor. If the person has not been vaccinated, measles vaccine may prevent disease if given within 72 hours of exposure. Immune globulin (a blood product containing antibodies to the measles virus) may prevent or lessen the severity of measles if given within 6 days of exposure.

If a child develops a rash after getting the MMR vaccine, are they contagious?

Transmission of the vaccine viruses does not occur from a vaccinated person, including those who develop a rash. No special precautions (e.g., exclusion from school or work) need be taken.

How do I get more information on measles?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: 269-969-6383

 www.facebook.com/CCPublicHealthDepartment/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Phone: 800-232-4636 (800-CDC-INFO)

Website: www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html

Spanish: www.cdc.gov/measles/about/index-sp.html

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Updated 3/31/19