

Measles

What is measles?

Measles, or **rubeola** [roo-BEE-uh-luh], is a serious and extremely contagious infection of the lungs. Caused by a virus, it happens most often in children but can occur in anyone exposed who has not been vaccinated or has never had measles.

Measles can be serious. For babies and young children, it can lead to middle ear and lung infections or even lifelong brain damage, deafness, or death. For adults, the infection can be very serious or even fatal. For those who are pregnant, early labor and miscarriage can occur.

How common is it?

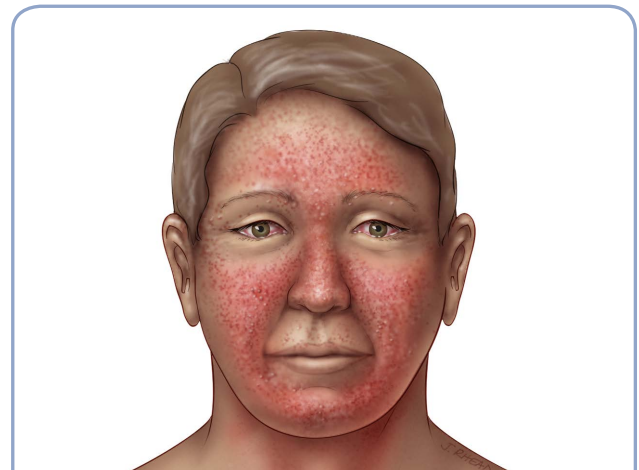
Because most people have been vaccinated, measles is very rare in the United States. However, there have been several outbreaks in recent years. Worldwide, about 20 million people get measles each year as it is still common in many countries. Travelers to these countries can get the infection and bring it back to the U.S. The majority of those who get measles have not been vaccinated.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually begin 8 to 12 days after you have been exposed to the virus and appear in 3 phases:

- 1 It starts with cold-like symptoms (cough, congestion, runny nose, fever, red eyes).
- 2 A red, raised rash develops about 3 to 5 days after, starting on the face and behind the ears.
- 3 The rash then spreads to the chest and abdomen (belly) and finally on the buttocks, arms, and legs.

Other symptoms include diarrhea, ear infection, and white spots inside the mouth on the inside of the cheeks. These are called Koplik's spots and are telltale signs of measles.



It usually takes 8 to 12 days after a person is exposed to the measles virus to get sick. You can pass the virus to others from 4 days before to 4 days after the rash first appears.

How is the virus spread?

Measles spread very quickly from person to person when someone:

- Touches the fluids from an infected person's eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Is breathing the air in the same area that an infected person could sneeze, cough, talk, or sing. Even if the person has left the room in the last 2 hours, you can still catch measles from them.

You can catch measles from someone even before they have the rash.

Who is most at risk?

Babies whose mothers are not immune and children who have not been vaccinated are most at risk for getting measles. Adults born after 1956 who have not been vaccinated (since 1970) or have not had the measles are also at risk, especially if they travel extensively to other countries where the disease is common. Your doctor can do a blood test to find out if you are immune to the virus.



How can I keep from getting it?

The very best way to keep from getting measles is to make sure that you and your family are vaccinated with the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine. This vaccine is typically given to:

- **Children** in 2 doses, with the first dose given at 12 to 15 months of age and the second dose given at 4 to 6 years of age.
- **Some infants** younger than 12 months if traveling out of the U.S.
- **Adults born after 1956** in at least 1 dose unless they can verify that they have either been vaccinated or have had the disease.

After being vaccinated, you or your child may experience a fever and perhaps a rash for a few days. In rare cases, there can be a more serious reaction (see “When should I call my doctor?”).

Who should NOT get the vaccine?

Do not get the MMR vaccine (or wait until your doctor says it is okay) if you or your child:

- Has ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction to anything that is in the vaccine (such as the antibiotic neomycin). Tell your doctor about any severe allergies.
- Have ever had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine.
- Are sick at the time the shot is scheduled.
- Are or could possibly be pregnant or plan to become pregnant in the next 28 days.
- Have immune system problems that can result from:
 - HIV/AIDS or other immune disorder
 - Drug treatments that weaken the immune system (such as steroids)
 - Any type of cancer (or being treated for cancer with radiation or medicines)
 - A history of a blood disorder
 - Being vaccinated in the past 4 weeks
 - Recent transfusion (or having received other blood products)

When should I call my doctor?

Contact your doctor right away if you or your child has symptoms of measles.

Go to an emergency room or call 9-1-1 if you or your child experiences any of the following after getting an MMR vaccine:

- Very high fever
- Rapid heart beat
- Unexplained behavior change
- Hives, swelling of the face and throat
- Difficulty breathing
- Dizziness
- Weakness

Are vaccines safe?

Being vaccinated against measles is the only way to prevent getting and spreading this serious disease. There is no evidence that the MMR vaccine causes autism. Medical research studies of thousands of children have found NO link between vaccines and autism. And, the study that first “reported” a link between the two, has been proven false.

Note: The MMR vaccine should not be given to pregnant women or to those considering pregnancy in the next 28 days.

For more information on vaccine safety, visit:

- [cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/index.html)
- [who.int/features/qa/84/en/](https://www.who.int/features/qa/84/en/)
- publichealth.org/public-awareness/understanding-vaccines/vaccine-myths-debunked/

How is it diagnosed and treated?

If you have symptoms of measles, your doctor will do a physical exam to check for rash and Koplik's spots, which typically appear in measles. If needed, blood tests can be done to confirm the diagnosis.

If you don't have symptoms but have been **exposed** to measles and are at risk of getting it, your doctor will likely recommend that you get the MMR vaccine within 72 hours (unless you are pregnant, have a severe egg allergy, or a weak immune system).

There are no specific medicines or other treatments for measles. Without complications, measles typically get better in days. To relieve symptoms, you can:

- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) and cool sponge baths to reduce fever.
- Get plenty of bed rest.
- Drink a lot of fluids, and eat soft, bland foods.
- Use a cool mist vaporizer to help loosen congestion in the lungs.
- Use dim lights. For children especially, measles can make them sensitive to bright lights.

If you are at risk for complications, ask your doctor about:

- Treatment with vitamin A for at-risk children.
- Immune **globulin** [glob-yuh-lin], which gives short-term protection against measles or at least makes the virus less severe. This is given to people who have weakened immune systems.


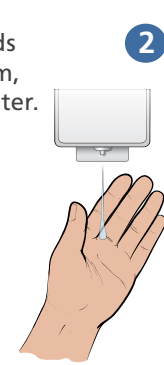

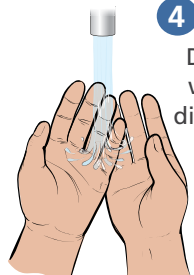
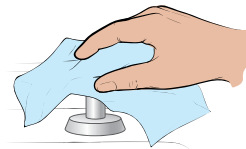
Prevent the spread of measles by keeping the infected person away from other people until 4 or 5 days after the rash first appears. Always wash hands before and after caring for the person and before preparing or eating food (see illustration at right).

If complications occur and a hospital stay is **required**, you (or your child) will need to be in an isolation room until the 5th day of your rash. This means that:

- The hospital room door will remain closed at all times with a sign on it about isolation precautions.
- Anyone entering the room will need to wear a surgical mask, and you will need to wear a mask anytime you leave the room.
- Healthcare providers will also wear gloves, a mask and gown, and perhaps protective goggles when they care for you.



Hand washing with soap and water

-  1 Wet hands with warm, running water.
-  2 Apply liquid soap or use a clean bar of soap. Lather well.
-  3 Rub your hands together vigorously for at least 15 to 20 seconds. Be sure to scrub all surfaces of your hands and fingers.
-  4 Rinse well. Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel.
-  5 Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

Hand washing with a hand sanitizer

-  1 Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Apply it to the palm of your hand. Read the label to see how much to apply.
-  2 Be sure to cover all surfaces of your hands and fingers. Rub your hands together until they are dry.

People can become infected if they touch surfaces that are contaminated with germs. Healthcare providers can spread the germs if they don't wash their hands often enough. If you don't see your healthcare providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so.



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