

Let's Talk About...

Measles

What is measles?

You probably think of a skin rash when you think of measles. Measles is really a respiratory infection with a skin rash and is caused by a virus. Other names for measles are rubeola, red measles, or hard measles.

Measles are very contagious. This means that one person can give it to another easily. You can get measles by touching fluids from an infected person's eyes, nose, or mouth. You can also get it by being in the same room with someone who has measles.

Children younger than 4 years old and people who are not vaccinated are most likely to get measles.

This happens most often in the winter and spring.

What happens when my child gets measles?

Measles starts with cold-like symptoms, including a cough, stuffy or runny nose, fever, and red eyes.

After that, a red, raised rash develops, starting on the face and behind the ears. It then moves down onto the chest and belly, then onto the arms and legs.

Spots often appear inside the mouth and inside the cheeks. These spots are not like other spots and usually appear a few days before the rash. Sometimes a doctor can identify measles earlier if they notice these spots.

It usually takes 8–12 days after exposure to the measles virus before a person gets sick. People can pass measles on to others 4 days before the rash appears, and until 4 days after it appears.

How can I prevent my child from getting measles?

Your child should be immunized with the MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine at 1 year old.

They should also get the MMR vaccine when they enter school at 4–6 years old. Another name for “immunize” is “vaccinate”. Remember, one measles vaccine dose is not enough to fully protect your child from measles. They will need a second dose.

If you and other members of your family have not been immunized, you should all get the MMR vaccine as soon as possible to prevent infection. Measles can cause a serious illness, so it's important to have your child immunized.

There are only a few reasons why a person should not be vaccinated:

- Severe egg allergy
- Pregnancy
- A weak immune system (immunodeficiency), except people with HIV

When a person who can get measles has been exposed to it, they should receive the measles vaccine within 72 hours. This will protect them from getting measles. A person with a weak immune system exposed to measles can receive immune globulin (an antibody that kills bacteria) so they will not get measles. Call your doctor if you or someone you know might be in danger of getting the measles.

How will my child feel after the vaccination?

Your child may get a fever, be fussy or irritable.

The fever may begin a few hours after the vaccination. They may get a slight rash 5–12 days after vaccination. Your child may also have an illness with fever 5–7 days after vaccination. This usually lasts 2–3 days.

How are measles treated?

Measles is not common because most people have been vaccinated. If you think your child has measles, you should call your doctor and schedule an appointment.

- Keep your child away from other people until 4–5 days after the rash appears.
- Give your child Tylenol® to reduce headache and fever.

- Make sure your child gets lots of bed rest.
- Try to have your child drink fluids like broth, Gatorade®, or water. Your child should also eat popsicles and soft, bland foods.
- Use a cool mist vaporizer to help your child breathe better.
- Use dim lights. Some children with measles are sensitive to bright lights.

What happens if my child is admitted to the hospital?

If admitted to the hospital, your child may need an IV (small tube that goes into the vein) to help them get enough liquids. Your child may also need oxygen, usually with a nasal cannula (a small tube under the nose that blows a little oxygen into each nostril). Your child may have to have mucus sucked out the nose. This is done with a small catheter (tube) put into the nose. It clears the nose and can help your child breathe better.

Why is my child in airborne precautions?

Healthcare workers have close contact with your child and can be exposed to the virus. They will wear masks each time they come in your child's room. Your child will be in a room designed to take the air out of the hospital. This protects other children who have not been vaccinated from getting sick.

Your child will need to stay in their room until they are no longer contagious. This is about 4 days after the rash starts. If your child goes home before 4 days have passed, the nurse will have your child wear a mask through the hospital halls to your car.

When can my child go home?

You can take your child home when they drink enough liquids, breathe safely and meet the doctor's requirements.

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