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. Measles is caused by a virus. Other names for measles are: rubeola, or "red" 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 four and people who are not vaccinated are most likely to get measles. It happens most often in the winter and spring.

## What happens?

Measles starts with cold-like symptoms, a cough, stuffy nose, 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. Often, spots appear inside the mouth and inside the cheeks. These spots are not like other spots and usually appear a few days before the rash, so sometimes a doctor can identify measles earlier.

It usually takes 8-12 days after a person is exposed to the measles virus before they get sick. People can pass measles on to others from 4 days before the rash appears until 4 days after the rash appears.

## How can I prevent my child from getting measles?

Your child should get immunized with the MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine when she is one year old and again when she enters school at 4-6 years old. Another name for "immunize" is "vaccinate". Remember, one measles vaccine dose is not enough to protect your child fully from getting measles. She will need a second dose. If you and other members of your family have not been immunized, you should all be immunized as soon as possible to prevent infection. It is important to have your child immunized because measles can cause a serious illness.

Measles can infect many people. For example:

- A child less than one year old whose mother is not immune.
- Children older than one year who have not been vaccinated (with MMR).
- Adults who have not been vaccinated (with MMR) or have not had measles.

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

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

When a person who can get measles has been exposed to the disease, they should receive the measles vaccine within 72 hours. This will protect them from getting measles. If a person with a weak immune system is exposed to measles, they can receive immune globulin so they will not get measles. Call your doctor if you or someone you know might be in danger of coming down with 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. A slight rash may appear from 5 to 12 days after vaccination. An illness with fever may appear for 5 to 7 days after vaccination. This usually lasts two to three days.

## How are measles treated?

Because most people have been vaccinated against measles, it is not common. If you think your child has measles, you should call your doctor and have her examined.

- Keep you child away from other people until four to five 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 and have her eat popsicles and soft, bland foods.
- Use a cool mist vaporizer to help loosen phlegm in your child's chest.
- Use dim lights. Some children with measles are sensitive to bright lights.

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