

# Measles - What You Need to Know

## What is measles?

- Measles is an extremely contagious virus which is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- Measles is so contagious that an infected person can spread the disease to 90% of others around them who are not immune.
- Measles was declared eliminated in the U.S. but still circulates in other countries. Travelers with measles can bring it into the country and spread it to others, especially those who are under- or unvaccinated.
- Measles causes runny nose, fever, cough, and pink eye. It also causes a full-body rash accompanied by a high fever (as high as 104°).
- To stop measles from spreading in a community, 95% of the community has to be vaccinated.

## How can we prevent measles?

- There is no treatment for measles. Vaccination is the best way to prevent measles.
- Two doses of the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine are 96% effective in preventing measles infection.
- Children should receive one dose of MMR vaccine between 12 and 15 months old and a second dose between 4 and 6 years old. Once vaccinated, a person is protected for life.
- Adults who are not immune should get at least one dose of MMR vaccine. This includes anyone born after 1957 who does not have written documentation of vaccination or laboratory confirmation of immunity to measles.

## Is the measles vaccine safe?

- The MMR vaccine is very safe.
- Like any medicine, vaccines can have side effects. Side effects from the MMR vaccine are normal, usually mild, and go away in a few days.
- Side effects from MMR vaccine may include a sore arm, fever, mild rash, and joint stiffness.
- The MMR vaccine is continuously studied and monitored for safety, and the risk for a severe allergic or other adverse reaction is rare. The choice to not get vaccinated is ultimately more risky because it could lead to catching a potentially deadly disease.

**Flip over to read about the risk of  
measles and what to do if you're exposed**



## What are the risks of measles?

- Measles is especially dangerous for young children. Adults over age 20, pregnant people, and people with compromised immune systems are also at high risk for complications.

### For children who get measles:

- 1 out of every 20 get pneumonia
- 1 out of every 1,000 develops encephalitis (brain swelling that can leave them deaf or developmentally disabled)
- 1-2 out of every 1,000 will die

### For pregnant people, measles risks include:

- Miscarriage
- Premature birth
- Low birth weight

- Those who recover from measles continue to be at risk for subacute sclerosing panencephalitis (SSPE), a nervous system disease which, while rare, is fatal.

## What should you do if you've been exposed to measles?

- If you've been exposed or have measles symptoms, contact your healthcare provider by phone. Remember, measles is very contagious, so it's best not to go in-person to a clinic.
- Measles is contagious from 4 days prior and for 4 days after you develop a rash.
- Isolate yourself from others and do not go out in public settings unless you need medical treatment. If you need treatment, call ahead to alert the medical staff so they can help reduce risk to others.

**Questions about the MMR vaccine? Talk to your healthcare provider, pharmacist, or community health center.**

**Find free a low-cost vaccine providers near you:  
[cdphe.colorado.gov/find-no-cost-vaccine-provider](https://cdphe.colorado.gov/find-no-cost-vaccine-provider)**

**#KeepCOHealthy**

### Sources

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/mmr/public/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/vaccines/mmr-vaccine.html>

<https://vaccinateyourfamily.org/vaccines-diseases/#collapse8>

