Measles

What You Need to Know

What is measles?

- **Measles is the most contagious virus in the world.** An infected person can spread the disease to 90% of others around them who are not immune.
- Measles spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus can linger in the air for up to 2 hours after an infected person leaves the room!
- Measles was declared eliminated in the U.S. in 2000, but the country is expected to lose it's elimination status by the end of 2026 due to a rapid increase in cases. This is largely a result of fewer parents choosing to vaccinate their children against measles.
- Measles is still common in other countries. International travelers with measles can bring it into the U.S. and spread it to others, especially those who are un- or under-vaccinated.

Common symptoms, which begin 7 to 21 days after exposure, include:

- Runny nose, cough, pink eye, full-body rash accompanied by a high fever (up to 103°-105°F), diarrhea, lack of appetite, bluish-white spots inside the mouth (Koplik spots)

How can we prevent measles?

There is no cure for measles. **Vaccination is the best way to prevent measles.**

MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine

- Two doses of the MMR vaccine are **97% effective** at 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.
  - However, children can receive MMR as young as 6 months old if there is an outbreak in the area or if they are travelling internationally.
- 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.

Herd Immunity

To stop measles from spreading in a community, **95%** of the community has to be vaccinated.

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

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.
- Measles affects the immune system in two ways:
  - It temporarily weakens the immune system, increasing a person's risk of getting other infections.
  - It attacks the immune system's memory, putting a person at risk for infections that they were protected against before they got measles. It can take years to regain immunity after measles infection.
- Those who recover from measles continue to be at risk for subacute sclerosing panencephalitis (SSPE), a nervous system diseases which, while rare, is fatal.

Among children who get measles in the U.S.:

- 1 out of 1,000 will develop encephalitis (brain swelling) that can leave them deaf or developmentally disabled
- 1 out of 20 will get pneumonia
- 1 out of 10 will get a bacterial ear infection, which can lead to permanent deafness
- 1-3 out of every 1,000 will die

For pregnant people, measles risks include:

- Miscarriage
- Premature birth
- Low birth weight

Measles vaccination is recommended **before** getting pregnant but is not given during pregnancy.

What should you do if you have 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.
- If your child was exposed to measles and has not been vaccinated, your child's doctor may give them the MMR vaccine within 72 hours or immune globulin (IG) within 6 days of exposure to help prevent the disease.

Find a vaccine provider near you:
bit.ly/FindCOVaxProvider

Sources

- https://cdphe.colorado.gov/dcphr/measles-information
- https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/mmr/public/index.html
- https://vaccinateyourfamily.org/measles/
- https://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/index.html
- https://www.chop.edu/conditions-diseases/measles-rubeola
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