

Measles: Questions and Answers

Information about the disease and vaccine

What is measles?

Measles is a serious disease caused by a virus. It spreads easily, but can be prevented with the MMR vaccine.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms usually appear 7 to 14 days after a person is infected, but may occur as early as 7 or as late as 21 days. Symptoms include:

- Blotchy rash
- Fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Feeling run down, achy
- Tiny white spots found inside mouth (Koplik's spots)

The rash usually begins on a person's face at the hairline and spreads downward to the rest of the body. These symptoms last about a week.

How serious is measles?

The disease can cause severe illness and complications, such as diarrhea, ear infections, pneumonia, encephalitis (brain infection), seizures, and death. These complications are more common among children under 5 years of age and adults over 20 years of age.

How does measles spread?

Measles spreads easily. When an infected person breathes, sneezes, or coughs, droplets containing the virus spray into the air. Those droplets can land in other people's noses or throats when they breathe and infect them. The measles virus can survive for 2 hours in air or on surfaces.

An infected person can spread the disease before knowing he or she is infected. People with measles can spread the disease from 4 days before to 4 days after the rash appears.

What is the treatment for measles?

While there is no specific treatment for measles, supportive care should be given to anyone who acquires measles.

What can I do to protect me and my family from measles?

The best protection against measles for individuals and the community is through routine immunization with MMR vaccine. This is a combined vaccine that protects against measles, mumps, and rubella.

Two doses of MMR vaccine provide full protection against measles to 99 out of every 100 persons vaccinated. Children should receive the first dose of MMR vaccine at 12–15 months of age and the second dose at 4–6 years of age. All adults born during or after 1957 should also get at least one dose of MMR vaccine (however, healthcare workers need 2 doses of vaccine no matter when they were born).

Additionally, measles is still common in many countries, including Europe, Asia, the Pacific, and Africa. The risk of measles may be very high for unvaccinated persons specially if they travel abroad or come in contact with an international traveler infected with measles.

How do I know if I have measles?

Measles can be diagnosed by a healthcare provider based on symptoms and laboratory testing. If you think you may have measles, call the health care facility ahead of time, and let them know you think you could have measles.

How can I learn more about measles or the vaccine?

To learn more talk to your healthcare provider, visit the CDC website <http://www.cdc.gov/measles>, or call the Pima County Health Department.



Pima County Health Department
Monday through Friday 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM
(520) 724-7797

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