

What is Measles?

Measles is a highly contagious virus that spreads through the air and affects the respiratory system (nose, throat, lungs) and body.

- If someone with measles is around, 9 out of 10 people without the vaccine can catch it.
- Measles can cause serious problems like lung infections (pneumonia) and brain swelling.
- It starts with a fever, runny nose, cough, and red, watery eyes. Later, a red rash spreads all over the body.

Who is most at risk?

Anyone who isn't protected against measles can get it, especially if traveling to countries where measles is still common.

Some people are more likely to have serious health problems from measles:

- Children under 5 years old
- Adults over 20 years old
- Pregnant women
- People with weak immune systems, like those with leukemia or HIV

How does Measles spread?

Measles spreads easily through:

- **Infected People:** Coughing or sneezing releases the virus from their nose and throat.
- **Air and Surfaces:** The virus can stay in the air or on surfaces for up to two hours. Breathing the air or touching a surface, then touching your face, can infect you.

What are the symptoms of Measles?

Symptoms appear 7-14 days after infection and develop in stages:

- First Symptoms:
 - High fever
 - Cough
 - Runny noses
 - Red, watery eyes
- 2-3 days after first symptoms
 - Tiny white spots (Koplik spots) appear inside the mouth

- 3-5 days after first symptoms
 - Red, flat rash starts on the head and spreads down the body
 - Rash may have small raised bumps and spots may merge as it spreads
 - Fever may rise above 104°F

Complications of Measles:

Less Severe

- **Ear infection:** 1 in 10 children with measles develops an ear infection
- **Diarrhea:** less than 1 in 10 adults experience diarrhea

More Severe

- **Hospitalization:** 1 in 5 unvaccinated people in the US who gets measles ends up in the hospital
- **Pneumonia:** 1 in 20 children with measles develops pneumonia, the most common cause of death from measles in young children
- **Brain Swelling (Encephalitis):** 1 in 1,000 children with measles develops brain swelling, which can cause seizures, deafness, or intellectual disabilities.
- **Death:** 1 to 3 in 1,000 children with measles die from respiratory or brain complications
- **Pregnancy Risks:** Pregnant people without the MMR vaccine risk premature birth or having a baby with low birth weight.

How do you care for Measles?

There are no medical cures for measles, only symptom management such as:

- Fluids
- Rest
- Over the counter medicine like Tylenol or Advil to reduce fever and discomfort. **Do not give aspirin**

The doctor may provide you with:

- [Vitamin A \(under the supervision of a healthcare provider\)](#)
- Antibiotics for bacterial infections that may develop (Antibiotics will NOT help measles).

Symptoms will go away in about 2 weeks.

When should you call a doctor?

Immediately!! Call your doctor if you think you have been exposed to Measles.

How to protect yourself and others?

Prevention: To protect yourself from measles, the best option is [vaccination](#).

- [What are the vaccination options for measles?](#)
 - **MMR Vaccine:** Protects against measles, mumps, and rubella. It's given in two doses:
 - First dose at 12-15 months
 - Second dose at 4-6 years
 - **MMRV Vaccine:** Protects against measles, mumps, rubella, and chickenpox. This vaccine is for children aged 12 months to 12 years. Two doses are recommended:
 - First dose at 12-15 months
 - Second dose at 4-6 years
- [Do I need a booster?](#)
 - If you have received two shots, you do not need a booster.
 - If you are a healthcare worker, international traveler, or work in close contact with a community where outbreaks are occurring, you may need a booster if you haven't received two shots
 - If you received a vaccine between 1963 and 1967 you may need a booster dose, as some of the earlier versions of the vaccine were not as effective.
- [Should I get vaccinated as a teenager or adult if I have not been before?](#)
 - Yes! Vaccines are recommended for children and adults without proof of immunity, especially:
 - Students in post-high school education
 - Healthcare workers
 - [International travelers](#)
 - People of childbearing age before pregnancy
- What if I am unsure if I have been vaccinated for measles?
 - Try and locate your vaccination record. This article from CDC suggests great tips: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines-adults/recommended-vaccines/keeping-vaccine-records-up-to-date.html>
 - If you do not have written documentation of measles immunity, you should get vaccinated with measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. There is no harm in getting another dose of MMR vaccine if you may already be immune to measles (or mumps or rubella).
- [Who should not get vaccinated?](#)
 - People who have had severe allergic reactions to previous doses, are pregnant, have weakened immune systems, or certain other health

conditions should consult with a healthcare provider before getting vaccinated.

- [Is the vaccine safe and effective?](#)
 - The MMR vaccine is very effective: 93% for measles with one dose and 97% with two doses. Side effects are usually mild.
 - There is no link between the MMR vaccine and autism.
 - Vaccinated people are less likely to spread the disease, even if they get infected.
 - The vaccine recipients are fully protected after 2 to 3 weeks.

If Infected: Isolation is critical in reducing spread! Stay home for 4 days after the rash appears to avoid spreading it. You should also practice good hygiene by:

- Covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, or use your sleeve.
- Washing your hands often.
- Not sharing drinks or utensils.
- Cleaning surfaces like toys, doorknobs, and counters.

Call your healthcare provider if you're worried about your symptoms.

How can I stay up-to-date on any measles outbreaks?

As of 2/21/25, the CDC will be providing weekly updates on measles outbreaks found [here](#), until further notice.