

# Measles

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is measles?**

Measles is a very contagious (easily spread) respiratory disease caused by a virus. Before the measles vaccine became available, measles was a common childhood disease. Measles is considered the most deadly of all childhood rash/fever illnesses.

### **Who gets measles?**

Anyone who has not already had measles or has not received the measles vaccine can get the disease. There are still cases of measles around the world where populations are not vaccinated against the disease.

### **How do people get measles?**

Measles is easily spread from person to person. Ninety percent of people who have close contact with an infected person will get measles, if they were not previously vaccinated. When an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes, the virus is released into the air and enters another person's body through their nose, mouth or throat. People can also become sick if they come in contact with the mucus or saliva (spit) from an infected person. The measles virus can live on infected surfaces and in the air for up to two hours.

### **What are the symptoms of measles?**

The symptoms of measles include:

- High fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes
- Rash (usually appears 3-5 days after symptoms begin) The rash usually begins as flat red spots that appear on the face at the hairline and spread downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs, and feet.

### **Are there complications with a measles virus infection?**

Measles can be serious in all age groups. However, children younger than 5 years of age and adults older than 20 years of age are more likely to suffer from measles complications. For every 1,000 children who get measles, one or two will die from it.

Other complications from measles infection include:

- Ear infections in nearly one out of every 10 children who get infected
- Pneumonia
- Swelling of the brain
- Miscarriage, pre-mature birth, or a low-birth-weight baby can result in a measles infection among pregnant women

### **How is measles diagnosed?**

A health care provider will observe symptoms and will perform lab testing to find out if a person is infected with measles.

### **What should I do if I think I came in contact with someone who has measles?**

Anyone who suspects an exposure is urged to CALL a healthcare provider BEFORE going to a medical office or emergency department. A person infected with measles can spread the disease before showing symptoms; therefore, special arrangements need to be made when you visit your doctor or emergency department to help protect others from getting sick. For more information, please visit the "Exposed to Measles?" document available at [https://nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/measles/measles\\_exposure\\_guidance\\_public.pdf](https://nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/measles/measles_exposure_guidance_public.pdf).

### **What is the treatment for measles?**

There is no cure for measles, only supportive treatment (bed rest, fluids and fever reduction). Most patients will recover on their own.

### **How can measles be prevented?**

Measles is a vaccine-preventable disease. The measles vaccine is given in combination with the vaccines for mumps and rubella. This vaccine (MMR) follows a two-dose schedule (one shot at 12 months and a second shot at four to six years of age). However, the second dose of MMR can be given anytime as long as it is at least four weeks after the first dose.

Another option is the MMRV vaccine (MMR plus varicella [chickenpox] vaccine). MMRV is only licensed for use in children between the ages of 12 months through 12 years. Ask your health care provider which option is best for you.

### **Where can I get more information on measles?**

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health [www.nj.gov/health](http://www.nj.gov/health)
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention [www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html)

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention