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COMMUNITY HEALTH

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# Measles

## what you need to know

Measles is a highly contagious viral infection that affects the respiratory system. It spreads easily and can cause serious complications, especially in young children and those with weakened immune systems.



### Symptoms to watch for

Symptoms appear 7-14 days after exposure and may include:

- High fever (may reach 104°F or higher)
- Cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes
- Tiny white spots (Koplik's spots) inside the mouth
- Red, blotchy rash that starts on the face and spreads downward



### Who is at risk?

People who are not vaccinated or have never had measles are at the highest risk.



### How is measles diagnosed?

Doctors can confirm measles through:

- Blood tests for measles antibodies
- Throat or nasal swabs
- Urine tests



### How does measles spread?

The virus spreads through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can remain in the air and on surfaces for up to two hours after an infected person leaves the area. A person with measles can spread the virus 4 days before and 4 days after the rash appears.

Airborne particles are tiny, can stay in the air for a long time, and travel longer distances. You can breathe them in even if you're some distance away from the source of the infection. Droplets are larger and released when you cough, sneeze, talk, or even breathe hard.



### Is there a treatment?

There is no specific cure for measles, but symptoms can be managed by:

- Drinking plenty of fluids
- Getting lots of rest
- Staying home and avoiding contact with others for at least 4 days after the rash appears

### Complications of measles include:

- Ear infections
- Pneumonia
- Severe diarrhea
- Brain inflammation (encephalitis)
- In rare cases, death

### Other possible complications:

Certain groups have an increased risk of severe complications, including:

- Infants and young children under 5 years old
- Pregnant women
- People with weakened immune systems



## How can measles be prevented?

The best protection against measles is the MMR vaccine (Measles, Mumps, and Rubella). Two doses are recommended. The MMR vaccine is safe and highly effective in preventing measles.



## A person is considered immune if they meet one of the following:

- Had two doses of measles vaccine
- Had a positive laboratory test for measles infection or measles immunity at some point in your life
- Were born before 1957



## Things to know about measles and vitamin A

Every year, measles is brought into the US by unvaccinated travelers who get infected by the virus in other countries. Anyone who isn't vaccinated is at risk of getting measles. Misinformation continues to circulate about the role that vitamins, specifically vitamin A, plays in managing the disease. Here are a few important things to know:

- **Vitamins do NOT prevent measles**
  - Only the measles vaccine can prevent measles.
    - All children should get 2 doses of MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine to prevent measles
  - Vitamins should NOT be used to prevent measles
- **Giving high doses of vitamins may be dangerous**
  - Routinely getting an overload of vitamins can actually hurt you.
    - For example, too much vitamin A can cause dizziness, nausea, headache, coma, and even death.
  - Due to the danger of overdoses, high-dose vitamin A should only be used in the management of measles under the direct supervision of a healthcare professional once a diagnosis is confirmed.
- **The best way to prevent measles is through vaccination**
  - Stay up-to-date with all recommended vaccines, including MMR
  - Stay healthy by exercising and eating a balanced diet. The best sources of vitamin A include:
    - Milk
    - Eggs
    - Cheese
    - Fortified breakfast cereals
    - Leafy green vegetables
    - Orange vegetables
    - Fish



## FAQ

- Children, ages 6-11 months can receive a dose of MMR; second and third doses are needed at 12 months and 4 years of age
  - The recommended ages for MMR are 1 & 4.
  - For special circumstances like outbreaks or exposure, infants as young as 6 months can receive the immunization, but additional boosters will still be needed if it is received early.
- Two doses of MMR vaccine provide 97% protection
- There is no measles-only vaccine for children
- Vitamin A may help reduce symptom severity but do NOT prevent measles or reduce long-term complications, like Subacute sclerosing panencephalitis (SSPE)