



Maine CDC

Measles Frequently Asked Questions

Symptoms

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that spreads through the air when a sick person coughs or sneezes. If one person has it, 90% of the people close to that person who are not immune will become infected. Staying up to date on vaccination is the best way protect yourself and others.

What are the signs and symptoms of measles?

Measles symptoms begin with fever, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes that last about 2 to 4 days. These symptoms are followed by a rash that usually lasts 5 to 6 days. The rash usually starts on the face and spreads downward covering the body, arms, and legs.

How do you get measles?

The measles virus spreads through the air when an infected person breathes, talks, coughs, or sneezes. People can get infected when they breathe contaminated air or touch their eyes, nose, or mouth after touching contaminated surfaces. Measles virus can remain infectious in the air and on surfaces for up to 2 hours after an infected person leaves an area.

If I get measles, when can I spread it to others?

People with measles can spread it to others 4 days before the rash starts through 4 days afterward. After someone is exposed to measles it usually takes about 7 to 10 days for a fever to start. The rash usually appears about 10 to 14 days after exposure, but it can show up anytime between 7 and 21 days.

If I get measles, what should I do?

Individuals who develop symptoms should contact their health care provider for instructions **before** going to the provider's office or hospital. This will help prevent the spread of further infection. If symptoms are consistent with the disease, a health care provider may test to determine a measles infection.

Are there complications of measles after an infection?

Yes, measles frequently causes serious complications during and after infection. In fact, complications can occur in as many as 3 out of 10 cases. These are most often seen in children under 5 years of age, adults over the age of 20, pregnant women, and individuals with a weakened immune system. Complications can include hospitalization, pneumonia, and encephalitis (swelling of the brain). Long-term issues include immune amnesia (suppressed immunity for months/years) and fatal brain inflammation (SSPE).

I've been exposed to someone who has measles. What should I do?



Immediately call your health care provider and let them know that you have been exposed to someone who has measles. Your health care provider can:

- Determine if you are immune to measles based on your vaccination record, age, or laboratory evidence of prior infection.
- Make special arrangements to evaluate you, if needed, without putting other patients and medical office staff at risk for getting measles.
- If you are not immune to measles, and are within a few days of your exposure, MMR vaccine or a medicine called immune globulin may help reduce your risk for developing measles. Your health care provider can advise you on next steps and monitor you for signs and symptoms of measles.
- If you are not immune and do not get MMR or immune globulin, you should stay away from settings where there are susceptible people (such as schools, hospitals, or childcare) until your health care provider says it's okay to return. This will help ensure that measles isn't spread to others, if you do develop measles. [Source: [U.S. CDC](#)]

Prevention

What vaccines are available for measles?

The two primary vaccines used to protect against measles are the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine and the MMRV (measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella) vaccine. Measles vaccine is routinely recommended at 12 months and 4 years of age.

- [Child and Adolescent Immunization](#)
- [Adult Immunization](#)
- [Pregnancy](#)

Why is getting vaccinated important?

Almost everyone who has not had the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine will get sick if they are exposed to those viruses. The vaccine keeps children from missing school or childcare; and parents from missing work to care for a sick child. Vaccination also limits the size, duration, and spread of outbreaks.

How much protection does the vaccine give a person?

Most people who are vaccinated with MMR will be protected for life. Vaccines and high rates of vaccination have made these diseases much less common.

Can I breastfeed my baby if I receive the measles vaccine?

Yes! It is safe for breastfeeding women to receive the MMR vaccine. The vaccine is not transmitted through breastmilk. Rather, breastmilk contains antibodies from the breastfeeding woman that can provide protection to keep the baby healthy.

What can I do to protect babies who can't get vaccinated?



Routine measles vaccination is scheduled for 12 months, with doses not typically advised for infants under 6 months. To protect infants under 12 months from measles, ensure all immediate caregivers are fully vaccinated (including pertussis/flu) to create a "cocoon" of immunity. Limit the baby's exposure to crowded, indoor public spaces, practice frequent handwashing, and consider breastfeeding, which provides protective antibodies. Young infants who are exposed to measles may need to receive medicine to prevent infection. Contact your health care provider if you think your infant has been exposed to measles. For high-risk situations, like international travel or local outbreaks, consult a pediatrician about administering the first dose as early as six months.

Can a pregnant woman get a measles vaccine?

No, a pregnant woman should **not** receive the measles (MMR) vaccine. Wait to get MMR vaccine until after you are no longer pregnant. Avoid getting pregnant for at least one month after getting MMR vaccine. Read about recommended [vaccines during pregnancy](#).

How many MMR vaccines do adults get?

Most adults born in 1957 or later need at least one dose of the MMR vaccine, provided they have no other evidence of immunity. High-risk individuals, including college students, health care workers, and international travelers, require two doses (separated by 28+ days). Those born before 1957 are generally considered immune.

Who shouldn't get vaccinated?

Some people should not get the MMR vaccine, or they should wait. People should check with their health care provider about whether they should get the vaccine if they:

- Have had an allergic reaction after a previous dose of MMR or MMRV vaccine, or has any severe, life-threatening allergies.
- Are or may be pregnant. Wait to get MMR vaccine until after you are no longer pregnant. Avoid getting pregnant for at least 1 month after getting MMR vaccine.
- Have a weakened immune system due to disease or medical treatments; or have a family member with a history of immune system problems.
- Have gotten any other vaccines in the past 4 weeks.
- Are feeling unwell or severely ill. Your doctor can advise you.

Travel

What do you recommend if people are planning a trip to an area with a measles outbreak?

1. Talk to your doctor about the MMR vaccine. Two doses of MMR vaccine provide better protection (97%) against measles than one dose (93%).

2. Check your destination and [CDC's Global Measles Travel Health Notice](#) for more travel health advice if you plan to travel internationally, including to countries where measles outbreaks have been reported.



After domestic travel to an area with an ongoing outbreak or international travel, watch for signs and symptoms of measles for 3 weeks after returning from your trip. If you or your child gets sick with a rash and a high fever, call your health care provider. Tell them you traveled to an area where they identified measles or another country and whether you or your child had received MMR vaccine.