

# Measles

IT ISN'T  
JUST A  
LITTLE  
RASH

## What is measles?

Measles is a vaccine-preventable infectious viral disease. It begins with a fever that lasts for a few days, followed by a cough, runny nose, and conjunctivitis (pink eye). A rash starts on the face and upper neck, spreads down the back and trunk, then extends to the arms and hands, as well as the legs and feet. After about five days, the rash begins to fade.

## How contagious is measles?

Measles is highly contagious, even before infected people develop a rash. The measles virus resides in the mucus in the nose and throat of infected people. When they sneeze or cough, droplets spray into the air. The droplets remain active and contagious on infected surfaces for up to two hours.

**Measles is so contagious that if one person has it, up to 9 out of 10 people around him or her will also become infected if they are not protected.** An infected person can spread measles to others even before knowing he/she has the disease—from four days before developing the measles rash through four days afterward.

## Is measles dangerous?

Some people think of measles as just a little rash and fever that clears up in a few days, but **measles can cause serious health complications**, especially in children younger than 5 years of age. Measles complications are dangerous. Six to 20 percent of the people who get the disease will get an ear infection, diarrhea, or even **pneumonia**. One out of 1,000 people with measles will develop inflammation of the brain (**encephalitis**), and about one out of 1,000 will die.

## How can I protect myself?

To protect your children, yourself, and others in the community, especially those who cannot take the vaccine, it is important to be vaccinated against measles. The measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine prevents measles and two other viral diseases: **mumps** and **rubella**. These three vaccines are safe given together and are usually given in two separate doses to ensure effectiveness.

## How effective is the MMR vaccine?

The measles vaccine is very effective. Two doses of measles vaccine are about 97% effective at preventing measles if exposed to the virus. One dose is about 93% effective. People are usually protected after about 2 or 3 weeks.

## Who is most at risk for measles?

Infants are at greatest risk since routine vaccination for measles does not begin until they are 1 year of age. Unvaccinated young children are at highest risk of measles and its complications, including death. Unvaccinated pregnant women are also at risk. Any non-immune person (who has not been vaccinated or was vaccinated but did not develop immunity) can become infected.

*More on back* 

## How do I know if I'm protected against measles?

You are protected if you have written documentation (records) showing at least **one** of the following:

- You received **two** doses of measles-containing vaccine, and you are:
  - ◇ a school-aged child (grades K-12)
  - ◇ an adult who will be in a setting that poses a high risk for measles transmission, including students at post-high school education institutions, healthcare personnel, and international travelers.
- You received **one** dose of measles-containing vaccine, and you are:
  - ◇ a preschool-aged child
  - ◇ an adult who will not be in a high-risk setting for measles transmission.
- A laboratory confirmed that you had measles at some point in your life.
- A laboratory confirmed that you are immune to measles.
- You were born before 1957.

If you're not sure whether you are up to date on measles vaccine, talk with your health care provider. [Learn more about who should and who shouldn't get the measles vaccine.](#)

## What should I do if I'm not immune to measles?

The best protection against measles is MMR vaccine, which provides **long-lasting protection against all strains of measles**. If you are not immune to measles, talk with your health care provider about getting MMR vaccine as soon as possible. If you are exposed to someone with one of these diseases before you are able to get the vaccine, talk with your health care provider. **It is not harmful to get MMR vaccine after being exposed to measles, mumps, or rubella, and doing so may possibly prevent later disease.** If you get MMR vaccine within 72 hours of initially being exposed to measles, you may get some protection against the disease, or have milder illness.

During outbreaks of measles or mumps, everyone without evidence of immunity should be brought up to date on their MMR vaccination. And some people who are already up to date on their MMR vaccination may be recommended to get an additional dose of MMR for added protection against disease.

## If measles has been eliminated, why are we still seeing cases?

In 2000, the United States declared that measles was eliminated from this country due to a highly effective measles vaccine, a strong vaccination program that achieves high vaccine coverage in children, and a strong public health system for detecting and responding to measles cases and outbreaks.

But every year, unvaccinated travelers (Americans or foreign visitors) get measles while they are in other countries and bring it into the United States. Typically, 2 out of 3 of these unvaccinated travelers are Americans. They can spread measles to other people who are not protected against measles, which sometimes leads to outbreaks. This can occur in communities with unvaccinated people. Most people in the United States are protected against measles through vaccination.



**Public Health**  
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Henderson County, NC

The Department of Public Health offers MMR vaccine on a walk-in basis. No appointment necessary. Call **(828) 694-6015** for more information.

**Hours:** Monday—Friday, 8:00 - 11:30 a.m. & 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.  
(Closed 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month for staff development and training.)

**Location:** 1200 Spartanburg Highway, Suite 100 | Hendersonville, NC 28792

**Website:** [HendersonCountyNC.gov/health](https://HendersonCountyNC.gov/health)

Sources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html> | <https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/diseases/rubeola.html> | <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/mmr/public/index.html>