



## **Measles Fact Sheet** **(rubeola, red or hard measles)**

**Measles is one of the most contagious diseases there is. If one person has it, 9 out of 10 people close to that person who aren't immune (protected), will also get measles. Also it can be dangerous — severe cases of measles can lead to brain damage and even death.**

Measles outbreaks are rare in the United States. However, outbreaks can still happen in areas where groups of people don't get vaccinated. Outbreaks have recently increased around the world in places like Europe, Africa, and South America. Since measles is still common in other countries, people can get the disease when they travel — and spread it to people who aren't vaccinated when they come home.

Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent measles. So when enough people get vaccinated against measles, the entire community is less likely to get it. So when you and your family get vaccinated, you help keep yourselves and your community healthy.

### **What is measles?**

Measles is an acute viral illness caused by a virus in the family paramyxovirus, genus *Morbillivirus*. Measles can be a serious disease, with 30% of reported cases experiencing one or more complications. Death from measles occurs in 2 to 3 per 1,000 reported cases in the United States. Complications from measles are more common among very young children (younger than five years) and adults (older than 20 years).

### **How is measles spread?**

Measles is spread from person to person through the air from infectious droplets; it is highly contagious. Transmission occurs when a person with measles coughs or sneezes and airborne droplets are in the air for another person to breathe. Airborne transmission can occur for up to 2 hours after a person with measles has been in a closed area. Anyone who has not had measles previously or who have not received the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine can become infected.

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

The symptoms usually occur in 2 stages. The first stage commonly begins with a runny nose, red watery eyes, fever, and cough. A red blotchy rash appears in the second stage, starting on the head and spreading down the body to the arms and legs and usually lasts for about 4-6 days.

### **When do symptoms start?**

The fever, runny nose, and cough usually appear 10 days after exposure but can appear as late as 18 days after exposure. The rash appears 3 to 7 days after the onset of the first symptoms.

### **When and for how long is a person able to spread measles?**

Infected people can spread measles to others from four days before through four days after the rash appears.



**What is the treatment for measles?**

There is no specific treatment for measles. Rest, and symptomatic treatment is best for uncomplicated cases.

**Should a person with measles be excluded from work or school?** Yes, for 4 days after the onset of the rash.

**If you get measles once, can you get it again?**

No. Adults born before 1957 are usually immune because they had measles as a child.

**How can you protect yourself against measles?**

The most effective way to prevent measles is the MMR vaccine. The current CDC recommendations for MMR vaccination are as follows:

- **Children** should receive their first dose of MMR vaccine at 12-15 months of age and their second dose at 4-6 years of age. Infants 6-11 months of age who will be traveling outside of the United States need 1 dose of MMR vaccine before departure. They should then get two more doses (one dose at 12-15 months of age and another dose at least 28 days later).
- **Adults** who have not had one dose of MMR vaccine or who do not have evidence of immunity should get vaccinated promptly.
- **Women of childbearing age** should check with their healthcare provider to make sure they are vaccinated *before* they get pregnant.
- **Healthcare personnel** should have documented evidence of immunity, according to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. Healthcare personnel without evidence of immunity should get two doses of MMR vaccine, separated by at least 28 days.

Recommended adult and childhood immunization schedules are available online at <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/is/Pages/parents.aspx>

**Where can I get vaccinated?**

- Contact your health care provider for information or to schedule an appointment. If you currently don't have access to a medical home or a health care provider contact your local public health center. <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Nursing/Pages/locations.aspx>
- Contact a health care provider who is enrolled to receive the vaccine through the Alaska Immunization Program. Here's a link to a list of providers: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/iz/Documents/ssv/StateSuppliedVaccineProviders.pdf>
- Contact your local retail pharmacy to see if MMR vaccination is available upon request at their location.