



Measles Frequently Asked Questions

Measles is a highly contagious virus that causes fever and a rash. Measles can cause other serious health complications. Anyone who is not vaccinated can get measles at any age.

How does measles spread?

The measles virus lives in an infected person's nose and throat mucus. When that person sneezes or coughs, the virus sprays into the air and people can breathe in the virus. The virus remains active and contagious in the air for up to two hours. People can also get measles by touching a surface that has the virus on it and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Measles is highly contagious — if one person has it, 90% of people around them will also get it if they are unvaccinated or otherwise not immune.

What are the symptoms of measles and when do they start?

Early symptoms of measles include fever, which can reach more than 104 degrees Fahrenheit (40 degrees Celsius); cough; runny nose; and red, watery eyes. Three to five days after symptoms start, a rash of red spots appears on the face and then spreads over the entire body.

Symptoms usually start seven to 14 days after contact with the virus; symptoms may start as late as 21 days after exposure.

When can a person with measles spread it to others?

A person can spread measles from four days before through four days after they first have a measles rash.

Can a person get measles more than once?

No. People who have had measles cannot get it again.

How can I protect myself from measles?

Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent measles. In the U.S., the measles vaccine is combined with mumps and rubella vaccines into one vaccine called MMR (measles, mumps and rubella). The MMR vaccine is safe and effective. Two doses of MMR vaccine are about 97% effective at preventing measles; one dose is about 93% effective. For more information about the MMR vaccine, visit [cdc.gov/measles](https://www.cdc.gov/measles).

When should people get vaccinated?

In the U.S., the first dose of the MMR vaccine is given after a child's first birthday. A second dose is given before a child enters school at ages 4 to 6 years. Anyone born after 1956 who has not received two doses of a measles-containing vaccine or does not have a blood test showing that they are immune to measles should receive two doses of MMR vaccine.

Infants ages 6 to 11 months should receive an early, extra dose of measles vaccine before traveling out of the country. Children age 12 months and older should receive two doses before international travel. Check with your pediatrician if you are planning a trip to make sure your children are protected.

Can measles cause other health problems?

Yes. Measles can be serious in all age groups. However, children younger than age 5 years (and especially infants), people who are pregnant and people with a weak immune system (such as from cancer treatment or HIV) are more likely to have complications from measles.

About 20% of people with measles who are unvaccinated are hospitalized. Health problems caused by measles include diarrhea, ear infections, pneumonia and encephalitis (brain swelling). In some cases, measles can cause death. In people who are pregnant, measles can cause miscarriage, premature labor and babies born with a low birth weight. In rare cases, several years after having had measles, people develop a complication called subacute sclerosing panencephalitis (SSPE), a fatal disease of the central nervous system.

Is there treatment for measles?

There is no specific medicine for measles, but there are medicines that can reduce symptoms, such as fever. People with complications may need treatment specific to their health problem.

What should I do if I am exposed to measles or my child is exposed to measles?

Call your health care provider right away. Your provider can evaluate you or your child and help monitor for symptoms. They can also determine if you or your child is immune to measles based on vaccination history, age or blood tests.

- People who have two measles vaccine doses or who are otherwise immune are protected and are unlikely to get measles.
- If you or your child is not immune, your provider may recommend an MMR vaccine.
- If you or your child is at higher risk of complications, your provider may recommend a medicine called immune globulin.
- Getting vaccinated within three days of initial exposure or getting immune globulin within six days of initial exposure reduces the risk of getting measles and can reduce symptoms if you do get it.
- People who receive an MMR vaccine following an exposure should not attend day care, school or work and should avoid contact with other people for 21 days. People who receive immune globulin should avoid these activities for 28 days.

Where can I find a health care provider or vaccination site?

For help finding a provider, call 844-NYC-4NYC (844-692-4692) or **311**. Most pediatricians offer the MMR vaccine. To find other vaccination sites, call **311**, visit nyc.gov/health/map, or visit nyc.gov/health and search for [immunization clinics](https://nyc.gov/health/immunization-clinics). For more information about measles, visit nyc.gov/health/measles.