

Measles (Rubeola) - Factsheet

What is measles (rubeola)?

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus. Sometimes it is called the '10-day,' 'hard,' or 'red' measles. This is different than rubella which is sometimes called 'German' or '3-day' measles. People sometimes confuse these diseases.

What are the symptoms of measles?

The first symptoms usually begin within 8 to 12 days after exposure, but can take up to 21 days. The rash usually appears within 14 days of exposure. Measles symptoms usually occur in two stages. In the first stage, most people have a fever, runny nose, redness of the eye(s), and cough. The second stage begins a few days later when a red spotty rash begins to develop on the face and spreads over the entire body. Little white spots, called Koplik's spots, may also be seen on the gums and inside of the cheeks.

How is measles spread?

Measles virus spreads very easily through the air when someone with measles coughs or sneezes, or by direct contact with infected nose or throat secretions.

How long are people contagious?

People are contagious from 4 days before the rash appears, through 4 days after the rash appears.

Who gets measles?

Although a person of any age can get measles, it is usually regarded as a childhood disease. Generally, preschool children, adolescents, young adults, and inadequately immunized individuals account for most of the measles cases in the United States. You can only get measles once; a person has permanent immunity after having the disease.

What treatment is available for people with measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

People should stay home from work, school, daycare, or other settings where others could be exposed until at least four days after the rash develops (i.e., returning on the 5th day).

How can I protect myself and my family from getting measles?

- Anyone born on or after January 1, 1957, who does not have a history of physician-diagnosed measles or serologic confirmation of measles immunity, should receive at least one dose of MMR vaccine (preferably two doses, at least 28 days apart), for maximum protection.
- Wash hands frequently with water and soap. Teach children to wash their hands too. (Sanitizing gel may be substituted when hands are not visibly soiled.)
- Always cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze and then wash your hands.