



MEASLES

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious virus that causes an acute respiratory illness. If one person has measles, nine to 10 people around him or her will also become infected unless they are vaccinated against measles.

Who gets measles?

Any unvaccinated individual can get measles. However, young children and pregnant people are most at risk of severe measles complications including but not limited to blindness, encephalitis, and death.

How is measles spread?

Measles spreads through the air when an infected individual coughs and sneezes. These airborne particles can remain in the room for up to two hours after the individual leaves.

What are the symptoms of measles?

The first symptoms are high fever (as high as 105 degrees F), cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes. Two to three days later, tiny white spots called kolpik spots may appear inside the mouth. Three to five days after symptoms begin, a rash breaks out. It usually begins as flat, red spots that appear on the face at the hairline and spread down the neck to the trunk, arms, legs, and feet. Immunocompromised patients may not develop the rash.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Measles symptoms appear on average 14 days after contact with the virus, but can range from seven to 21 days.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Children with measles should be kept out of school and work for four days after appearance of the rash.

What is the treatment for measles?

There is no medication to treat measles. Medical care is supportive and to help relieve symptoms and address complications such as bacterial infections. Severe measles cases among children, such as those who are hospitalized, should be treated with vitamin A. Vitamin A should be administered immediately on diagnosis and repeated the next day.



Frequently Asked Questions

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of measles?

Measles can be prevented with MMR vaccine. The vaccine protects against three diseases: measles, mumps, and rubella.

Resources

Heyman, D. (2015) Control of Communicable Disease Manual (20th edition).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/>

Delaware Division of Public Health's "Managing Infectious Disease in Childcare Settings." <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dph/epi/files/ChildCareManual2021.pdf>