

Measles – The Basics

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Patients

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory virus that can sometimes result in serious complications such as pneumonia and brain infection (encephalitis). Symptoms can occur 7 to 21 days after exposure to another person with measles. It starts with high fever lasting several days, followed by cough, sore throat, conjunctivitis (red eyes), and a rash. The rash usually starts on the face, along the hairline, and behind the ears, and then moves to the rest of the body. After about 5 days, the rash fades in the same order it appeared.

How can I tell the difference between measles and the common cold?

First, it is important to recognize that the best way to tell between measles and the common cold is that you can't get measles without an exposure to someone with measles. Your risk for exposure to the common cold is far greater than to measles. You are only considered exposed to measles if you meet the below criteria:

- Exposed within the past 3 weeks (21 days) **AND one of the below**
 1. Exposure to a person who has a fever and rash and recently traveled internationally
 2. Exposure to a person who has been diagnosed with the measles
 3. Present at time and location of another measles patient based on OCPH health alert <http://www.ochealthinfo.com/phs/about/dcepi/epi/dip/prevention/measles>

While early measles symptoms can be similar to the common cold, look out for red, teary eyes (conjunctivitis) and a rash starting at the head. These are unique features of measles and less common in other virus infections. Remember, if you have not been exposed to someone with measles or if you have been vaccinated, then it is far more likely that you have the common cold or other virus and **not** measles.

How does measles spread?

Measles is one of the most contagious of all infections. In an **unvaccinated** group, one person with measles will infect at least 12 other unvaccinated persons. The virus is transmitted through the air when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes. Patients are contagious to others starting 4 days before and after their rash appears.

Who is at highest risk for measles?

People who are **not vaccinated** are at high risk for getting measles if exposed. Since the first dose of MMR vaccine is given at 12-15 months of age, infants are most susceptible. Those with weakened immune systems (e.g., getting chemotherapy for cancer, on steroids or other immune lowering medicines) are at higher risk for all infections. If you work with children, in

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college or vocational school settings, or in healthcare facilities, you are at higher risk of being exposed to someone with measles and should ensure you are vaccinated.

How can I prevent getting measles?

The best way to prevent measles and its spread is to get vaccinated. The measles vaccine is very effective and provides lifelong immunity for 93% of people after one dose, and 97% of people after 2 doses. The measles vaccine is part of the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine, which prevents all 3 viral infections. It is always a good idea to avoid contact with those who show signs of contagious illness and to wash your hands or use hand sanitizers regularly.