



# Measles Fact Sheet

## What is measles?

Measles, not to be confused with German measles (rubella), is an extremely contagious disease caused by a virus. Measles is so contagious that if one person has it, up to 90% of the people close to that person who are not immune will also become infected.

## Who gets measles?

Anyone, regardless of age, who has not had measles or has not been adequately immunized may get the disease. Most cases occur in unimmunized preschoolers and young adults.

## How is measles spread?

Measles is spread through the air by droplets from the nose, throat, and mouth of an infected person by coughing, sneezing, or simply talking.

## What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms typically begin 7 to 14 days after infection with a high fever, cough, runny nose and red watery eyes. A rash breaks out 3 to 5 days after symptoms begin. The rash starts as flat red spots on the face and hairline that spread downward to the rest of the body. The symptoms may last from 1 to 2 weeks.

Measles isn't just a little rash. It can be dangerous, especially for babies and young children. Children younger

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## Measles Fact Sheet

than 5 years of age and adults older than 20 years of age are more likely to suffer from complications. Pregnant women and people with compromised immune systems are also at a higher risk of complications. Common complications are ear infections and diarrhea. Serious complications include pneumonia, encephalitis, premature birth, and death from respiratory or neurological complications.

### **How long is an infected person able to spread measles?**

An infected person is able to spread measles from 4 days before the rash starts to 4 days after the rash appears.

### **Can a person get measles again?**

No. One attack of measles provides protection for life.

### **What is the treatment for measles?**

There is no specific treatment for measles. Bedrest is advisable while the patient has a fever. Infants with very high fever and children with headaches should be treated with anti-fever medicines.

### **Should people who have been around a person infected with measles be treated?**

Anyone who has not had measles or has not been immunized should receive measles vaccine immediately. Infants under one year old may receive immune globulin

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## Measles Fact Sheet

(IG) or measles vaccine depending on the child's age. Immediately call your doctor and let them know that you have been exposed to someone who has measles. Do not go to a doctor's office without calling. This way you do not put other patients and medical staff at risk.

### **How can the spread of measles be stopped?**

The best way to stop measles is to immunize all children by 15 months of age with measles vaccine (combined with rubella and mumps vaccines or MMR). A second dose of measles vaccine between 4 and 6 years of age or before starting kindergarten is now required for children entering school in Oklahoma. Adults born after 1956 may also need measles vaccine.

### **Does measles vaccine cause reactions?**

In most cases, vaccines are effective and cause no side effects or only mild reactions such as fever or soreness at the injection site. Very rarely, people experience more serious side effects, like allergic reactions. About 1 child in 5 will develop a rash or fever which begins a week or two after vaccination and lasts a few days. On rare occasions (1 in every million shots) a child may have a more serious reaction to MMR vaccine such as inflammation of the brain (encephalitis). Be sure to tell your healthcare provider if your child has health problems or known allergies to medications or food.

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## Measles Fact Sheet

### **Where can children receive measles vaccine?**

Children and adults may receive the measles vaccine at county health departments throughout Oklahoma or with your private doctor.

*For further information, contact the  
Oklahoma City-County Health  
Department (405) 425-4437*

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