

Measles FAQ



Department
of Health

What is measles?

Measles is a vaccine-preventable, infectious, viral respiratory disease caused by the measles virus.

How can I catch measles?

Measles is highly contagious and is spread easily. The measles virus resides in the mucus in the nose and throat of infected people. When they sneeze or cough, droplets spray into the air and the droplets remain active and contagious on infected surfaces for up to 2 hours. Infected people are usually contagious from about 4 days before their rash starts to 4 days afterwards. Thus, an infected person can spread the disease before knowing he or she is infected.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles symptoms begin with fever, runny nose, cough, loss of appetite, and red, watery eyes for about four days, followed by a rash. The rash usually lasts 5-6 days and begins at the hairline, moves to the face and upper neck, and proceeds down the body.

The disease can also cause severe illness and complications, such as diarrhea, ear infections, pneumonia, encephalitis (brain infection), seizures, and death. These complications are more common among children under 5 years of age and adults over 20 years of age.

How long does it take to show signs of measles after being exposed?

It takes an average of 10-12 days from exposure to the first symptom, which is usually fever. The measles rash does not usually appear until approximately 14 days after exposure, 2-3 days after the fever begins.

How is measles diagnosed?

Measles is diagnosed by a combination of the patient's symptoms and by laboratory tests.

Is there a treatment for measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles. People with measles need bed rest, fluids, and control of fever. Patients with complications may need treatment specific to their problem.

Can someone get measles more than once?

No.