

Measles



Frequently Asked Questions

What is measles?

Measles is a very contagious (easily spread) respiratory disease caused by a virus. Before the measles vaccine became available, measles was a common childhood disease. Measles is considered the most deadly of all childhood rash/fever illnesses.

Who gets measles?

Anyone who has not already had measles or has not received the measles vaccine can get the disease. There are still cases of measles around the world where populations are not vaccinated against the disease.

How do people get measles?

Measles is easily spread from person to person. Ninety percent of people who have close contact with an infected person will get measles, if they were not previously vaccinated. When an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes, the virus is released into the air and enters another person's body through their nose, mouth or throat. People can also become sick if they come in contact with the mucus or saliva (spit) from an infected person. The measles virus can live on infected surfaces and in the air for up to two hours.

What are the symptoms of measles?

The symptoms of measles include:

- High fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes
- Rash (usually appears 3-5 days after symptoms begin) The rash usually begins as flat red spots that appear on the face at the hairline and spread downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs, and feet.

Are there complications with a measles virus infection?

Measles can be serious in all age groups. However, children younger than 5 years of age and adults older than 20 years of age are more likely to suffer from measles complications. For every 1,000 children who get measles, one or two will die from it.

Other complications from measles infection include:

- Ear infections in nearly one out of every 10 children who get infected
- Pneumonia
- Swelling of the brain
- Miscarriage, pre-mature birth, or a low-birth-weight baby can result in a measles infection among pregnant women

How is measles diagnosed?

A health care provider will observe symptoms and will perform lab testing to find out if a person is infected with measles.

What should I do if I think I came in contact with someone who has measles?

Anyone who suspects an exposure is urged to CALL a healthcare provider BEFORE going to a medical office or emergency department. A person infected with measles can spread the disease before showing symptoms; therefore, special arrangements need to be made when you visit your doctor or emergency department to help protect others from getting sick. For more information, please visit the "Exposed to Measles?" document available at https://nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/measles/measles_exposure_guidance_public.pdf.

What is the treatment for measles?

There is no cure for measles, only supportive treatment (bed rest, fluids and fever reduction). Most patients will recover on their own.

How can measles be prevented?

Measles is a vaccine-preventable disease. The measles vaccine is given in combination with the vaccines for mumps and rubella. This vaccine (MMR) follows a two-dose schedule (one shot at 12 months and a second shot at four to six years of age). However, the second dose of MMR can be given anytime as long as it is at least four weeks after the first dose.

Another option is the MMRV vaccine (MMR plus varicella [chickenpox] vaccine). MMRV is only licensed for use in children between the ages of 12 months through 12 years. Ask your health care provider which option is best for you.

Where can I get more information on measles?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health <http://www.nj.gov/health>
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html>

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

MMR (Measles, Mumps, and Rubella) Vaccine: *What You Need to Know*

Many Vaccine Information Statements are available in Spanish and other languages. See www.immunize.org/vis

Hojas de información sobre vacunas están disponibles en español y en muchos otros idiomas. Visite www.immunize.org/vis

1 Why get vaccinated?

Measles, mumps, and rubella are viral diseases that can have serious consequences. Before vaccines, these diseases were very common in the United States, especially among children. They are still common in many parts of the world.

Measles

- Measles virus causes symptoms that can include fever, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes, commonly followed by a rash that covers the whole body.
- Measles can lead to ear infections, diarrhea, and infection of the lungs (pneumonia). Rarely, measles can cause brain damage or death.

Mumps

- Mumps virus causes fever, headache, muscle aches, tiredness, loss of appetite, and swollen and tender salivary glands under the ears on one or both sides.
- Mumps can lead to deafness, swelling of the brain and/or spinal cord covering (encephalitis or meningitis), painful swelling of the testicles or ovaries, and, very rarely, death.

Rubella (also known as **German Measles**)

- Rubella virus causes fever, sore throat, rash, headache, and eye irritation.
- Rubella can cause arthritis in up to half of teenage and adult women.
- If a woman gets rubella while she is pregnant, she could have a miscarriage or her baby could be born with serious birth defects.

These diseases can easily spread from person to person. Measles doesn't even require personal contact. You can get measles by entering a room that a person with measles left up to 2 hours before.

Vaccines and high rates of vaccination have made these diseases much less common in the United States.

2 MMR vaccine

Children should get 2 doses of MMR vaccine, usually:

- First dose: 12 through 15 months of age
- Second dose: 4 through 6 years of age

Infants who will be traveling outside the United States when they are between 6 and 11 months of age should get a dose of MMR vaccine before travel. This can provide temporary protection from measles infection, but will not

give permanent immunity. The child should still get 2 doses at the recommended ages for long-lasting protection.

Adults might also need MMR vaccine. Many adults 18 years of age and older might be susceptible to measles, mumps, and rubella without knowing it.

A third dose of MMR might be recommended in certain mumps outbreak situations.

There are no known risks to getting MMR vaccine at the same time as other vaccines.

There is a combination vaccine called **MMRV** that contains both chickenpox and MMR vaccines. MMRV is an option for some children 12 months through 12 years of age. There is a separate Vaccine Information Statement for MMRV. Your health care provider can give you more information.

3 Some people should not get this vaccine

Tell your vaccine provider if the person getting the vaccine:

- **Has any severe, life-threatening allergies.** A person who has ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction after a dose of MMR vaccine, or has a severe allergy to any part of this vaccine, may be advised not to be vaccinated. Ask your health care provider if you want information about vaccine components.
- **Is pregnant, or thinks she might be pregnant.** Pregnant women should wait to get MMR vaccine until after they are no longer pregnant. Women should avoid getting pregnant for at least 1 month after getting MMR vaccine.
- **Has a weakened immune system** due to disease (such as cancer or HIV/AIDS) or medical treatments (such as radiation, immunotherapy, steroids, or chemotherapy).
- **Has a parent, brother, or sister with a history of immune system problems.**
- **Has ever had a condition that makes them bruise or bleed easily.**
- **Has recently had a blood transfusion or received other blood products.** You might be advised to postpone MMR vaccination for 3 months or more.



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- **Has tuberculosis.**
- **Has gotten any other vaccines in the past 4 weeks.** Live vaccines given too close together might not work as well.
- **Is not feeling well.** A mild illness, such as a cold, is usually not a reason to postpone a vaccination. Someone who is moderately or severely ill should probably wait. Your doctor can advise you.

4 Risks of a vaccine reaction

With any medicine, including vaccines, there is a chance of reactions. These are usually mild and go away on their own, but serious reactions are also possible.

Getting MMR vaccine is much safer than getting measles, mumps, or rubella disease. Most people who get MMR vaccine do not have any problems with it.

After MMR vaccination, a person might experience:

Minor events:

- Sore arm from the injection
- Fever
- Redness or rash at the injection site
- Swelling of glands in the cheeks or neck

If these events happen, they usually begin within 2 weeks after the shot. They occur less often after the second dose.

Moderate events:

- Seizure (jerking or staring) often associated with fever
- Temporary pain and stiffness in the joints, mostly in teenage or adult women
- Temporary low platelet count, which can cause unusual bleeding or bruising
- Rash all over body

Severe events occur very rarely:

- Deafness
- Long-term seizures, coma, or lowered consciousness
- Brain damage

Other things that could happen after this vaccine:

- People sometimes faint after medical procedures, including vaccination. Sitting or lying down for about 15 minutes can help prevent fainting and injuries caused by a fall. Tell your provider if you feel dizzy or have vision changes or ringing in the ears.
- Some people get shoulder pain that can be more severe and longer-lasting than routine soreness that can follow injections. This happens very rarely.
- Any medication can cause a severe allergic reaction. Such reactions to a vaccine are estimated at about 1 in a million doses, and would happen within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

As with any medicine, there is a very remote chance of a vaccine causing a serious injury or death.

The safety of vaccines is always being monitored. For more information, visit: www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/

5 What if there is a serious problem?

What should I look for?

- Look for anything that concerns you, such as signs of a severe allergic reaction, very high fever, or unusual behavior.

Signs of a **severe allergic reaction** can include hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, and weakness. These would usually start a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

What should I do?

- If you think it is a **severe allergic reaction** or other emergency that can't wait, call 9-1-1 and get to the nearest hospital. Otherwise, call your health care provider.

Afterward, the reaction should be reported to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). Your doctor should file this report, or you can do it yourself through the VAERS web site at www.vaers.hhs.gov, or by calling 1-800-822-7967.

VAERS does not give medical advice.

6 The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program

The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP) is a federal program that was created to compensate people who may have been injured by certain vaccines.

Persons who believe they may have been injured by a vaccine can learn about the program and about filing a claim by calling 1-800-338-2382 or visiting the VICP website at www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation. There is a time limit to file a claim for compensation.

7 How can I learn more?

- Ask your healthcare provider. He or she can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.
- Call your local or state health department.
- Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
 - Call 1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO) or
 - Visit CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/vaccines

Vaccine Information Statement MMR Vaccine

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