

## Measles Fact Sheet

### What is Measles?

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory virus that causes febrile rash illness. Measles has been eliminated (no sustained circulation) in the United States for decades. However, there can still be measles cases, as it is easily imported by unvaccinated travelers and can spread in under-immunized communities. Measles spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes and the virus can remain in the room for two hours after the infected person has left. One person can spread it to many others if the other people in the room are not protected.

### Disease Course

The incubation period is typically 11–12 days from exposure to measles virus until the first symptoms appear (prodromal symptoms). A rash follows the prodromal symptoms 2–4 days later and usually lasts 5–6 days.

### Symptoms

- Fever, cough, coryza, or conjunctivitis. Koplik spots (tiny white spots inside the mouth) may also appear 2–3 days after symptoms first appear.
- Rash: A maculopapular rash (rash of both flat and raised skin lesions) begins on the head and face and then spreads downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs, and feet. The spots may become joined together as they spread from the head to the body. Fever may spike to more than 104° F when rash appears.

### Spread

Measles is spread by airborne transmission with mucus or droplets from the nose or throat of an infected person, usually when a person coughs or sneezes. It grows in the nose, throat and surrounding lymph nodes and spreads to other areas of the body.

### Contagious Period

People are most infectious before showing signs or symptoms from four days before developing the measles rash through four days after rash onset.

### Complications

- Most common complications: Diarrhea and otitis media.
- Most severe complications: Pneumonia, encephalitis, and death. Patients may require hospitalization. Children younger than 5, adults older than 20, pregnant women, and immunocompromised persons are at most risk of serious complications.

### Precautions

- Infants, children, and adults who are under immunized or unimmunized should be excluded from school or work until four days after the rash has disappeared.
- Those who are immune compromised are also at greater risk.

### Prevention

- The best way to protect against measles is to get the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine (MMR vaccine). Doctors recommend that all children get the MMR vaccine. Anyone who has not received 2 doses of a measles-containing vaccine (preferably MMR vaccine) should be vaccinated.
- Pregnant women should not receive the vaccine. Pregnancy should be avoided for 4 weeks after vaccination with MMR. The use of good coughing/handwashing techniques helps in controlling illnesses. Persons who may have been exposed should be educated on the signs and symptoms of measles disease and should seek medical attention as soon as any of these symptoms begin.

### Diagnosis and Treatment

There is no specific treatment. Supportive care should be given as indicated. Anyone with measles should not go back to childcare, school, or work until 4 days after the rash has disappeared and is no longer symptomatic. Contacts to a measles case should have their immunization status evaluated.

Additional guidance can be found on the CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html>

### Need more information?

Please call the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department's Communicable Disease Program at 402-441-8053.