

What is measles?

Measles (also known as rubeola or “hard” or “red” measles) is a viral disease that causes fever and a rash. In rare cases, it causes serious complications and even death. Measles usually starts with a fever, runny nose, cough, and red, watery eyes. After two to four days of these symptoms, a rash develops, which usually starts on the face and spreads downward to cover most of the body. The rash lasts at least three days and often a week or more. About 30 percent of people who have measles develop one or more complications, such as diarrhea, ear infections, and pneumonia. Rarely, measles causes very serious complications, such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), seizures, brain damage, and death. Measles should not be confused with rubella (also known as “German” or “three-day” measles), which is a milder illness.

Who gets measles?

Anyone not fully vaccinated against measles or who hasn’t had measles disease is at risk. Most infants younger than 12 months are at risk because they’re too young to get the vaccine. Pregnant women, young kids, and people with weakened immune systems are at highest risk for complications from measles. Measles spreads easily. About 92 to 94 percent of the population must be vaccinated or immune to measles in order to prevent ongoing transmission.

How common is measles in Washington?

Measles is rare in our state. Most kids and younger adults in the U.S. have had measles vaccine. Nearly all older adults (born before 1957) had measles disease as children, making them immune. Now, most cases of measles in the U.S. occur when an unprotected person travels internationally, gets exposed to the illness while abroad, and gets sick after returning to the U.S. or, when a foreign visitor exposed to measles in their home country gets sick after arriving in the U.S. If these ill travelers visit places where a lot of people are not immune, localized outbreaks can occur. After having fewer than 20 cases reported in each of the previous ten years, our state had 32 measles cases in 2014, including three outbreaks with 6-16 cases in each. Find information online about [reported measles cases](#) in our state since 1980.

How does measles spread?

Measles spreads easily when infected people cough or sneeze and spray droplets of the measles virus into the air, which others then breathe in. The virus can remain in the air for up to two hours after an infected person leaves a room. Measles can also be spread when discharge from the nose or mouth of an infected person comes in contact with the mouth, nose, or eyes of another person. Measles is most contagious during the four or five days before and four days after the rash appears. This means the virus can spread before infected people know they’re sick.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of measles usually appear about 10 days after exposure to the measles virus. The time it takes to develop symptoms ranges from 7 to 21 days after exposure.

How is measles prevented?

Get vaccinated to prevent measles. Community (or herd) immunity helps slow down and stop the spread of disease among people and only works when most people in the community have immunity to the disease. More than 90% of us must have immunity to measles in order to keep

the disease from spreading. Both kids and adults can get the measles vaccine and can help stop outbreaks and lower the risk of infection to babies and others most likely to get severe cases of measles.

When a measles case occurs, exposed at-risk people need either vaccine or immune globulin (IG) to prevent illness or reduce the severity of the illness if they get sick. This must happen in the first few days after exposure.

Who needs measles vaccine?

Kids need two doses of measles vaccine; the first dose at age 12 to 15 months and the second before school entry at age 4 to 6 years.

Young kids who travel abroad and who are at risk need extra measles vaccine:

- Infants aged 6 to 11 months need one dose of measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine before travel. They still need to get both measles vaccine doses at 12 to 15 months and four to six years.
- Kids aged 12 months or older need two doses of MMR (separated by at least 28 days) before travel.

Most adults born before 1957 had measles and are immune. Adults born in or after 1957 should get one dose of the vaccine if they haven't had measles or didn't get the vaccine in 1968 or later. A blood test can show if someone has had measles disease or has received measles vaccine in the past. Health care workers, college students, and international travelers need a second dose of measles vaccine.

What should I do if I think someone in my family has measles?

If you think someone in your family has measles, call your health care provider or health department right away to get an evaluation. Before entering a healthcare facility, call to tell them about the possibility of measles so steps can be taken to avoid exposing other people. If the provider agrees the illness may be measles, you must take a test to confirm the diagnosis. Exposed at-risk people may need to get vaccinated or IG to prevent or modify measles. Exposed at-risk people should stay away from the public and avoid contact with susceptible people until the risk of getting the disease passes (21 days after the last exposure) or until a blood test shows that they are immune. If symptoms are present, stay away from other people for at least four days after the rash starts to prevent the spread of disease.

What should I do if I was around someone with measles?

If you are uncertain of your immunity (see "Who needs measles vaccine," above), consult your health care provider or local health department immediately. Your doctor might recommend you get a blood test to check your immunity, or receive a vaccine or a medicine called immune globulin that might prevent or modify measles.

Where can I get more information?

- Your local health department
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/AboutUs/PublicHealthSystem/LocalHealthJurisdictions.aspx>
- Communicable Disease Epidemiology at 206-418-5500 or 877-539-4344 (toll free).
- Office of Immunization and Child Profile at 360-236-3595 or
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/Immunization/DiseasesandVaccines/MeaslesDisease.aspx>