

# Measles

## FACT SHEET



Washtenaw County  
Health Department

### What is Measles?

Measles (rubeola) is an extremely contagious disease caused by the measles virus, which can cause complications such as pneumonia and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). Measles can also cause miscarriages or premature delivery in pregnant women.

### What are the symptoms?

- The illness starts with a runny nose, red eyes, cough, fever, and sore throat.
- 2-3 days after symptoms begin, tiny white spots may appear in the mouth.
- A raised, red rash appears on the 3rd-5th day of illness. It starts on the face and spreads down the body and out to the arms and legs. This rash usually lasts 4-7 days.
- Symptoms start 7-14 days after being exposed to measles, and last from 1-2 weeks.
- Complications can include ear infections, pneumonia, seizures, brain damage.

A person with measles is contagious for 4 days before and 4 days after the rash appears. If you suspect measles, seek medical treatment as soon as possible.

### How is it spread?

Droplets from the nose or mouth, through sneezing and coughing, spread measles from one person to another. If other people breathe the contaminated air or touch the infected surface, then touch their eyes, noses or mouths, they can become infected. Measles is so contagious that if one person has it, 90% of the people close to that person who are not immune will also become infected.

Most measles cases in the United States are now imported from other countries where outbreaks are occurring.

### How is it treated?

- There is no specific medicine to cure measles.
- If you or your child develops symptoms, consult your health care provider for the diagnostic testing that is necessary to prove the illness is measles.
- Rest, plenty of fluids, and a non-aspirin product (acetaminophen, ibuprofen) can be used to reduce fever and discomfort.  
**Aspirin should not be used in children with viral illnesses since there have been cases associated with the development of Reye Syndrome.**
- The sick person should stay at home until **4 days after the appearance of the rash.**

### How is it prevented?

The best way to prevent measles is to be vaccinated against it. The vaccine is given in combination with the mumps and rubella vaccines, known as **MMR** vaccine. Two (2) MMR injections are needed to be completely immunized.

Teenagers and adults who do not know if they are protected against measles should ask their doctor or clinic about the **MMR** vaccine.

**Pregnant women should not receive the live vaccine—and all women of childbearing age should avoid anyone with measles.**

**If you plan to travel, please discuss your MMR vaccine status with your healthcare provider prior to travel.**

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*