

Measles (Rubeola)

What is measles?

Measles is a highly infectious viral disease that is also known as rubeola, seven-day measles, hard measles, or old-fashioned measles. It is characterized by a high fever and a red blotchy rash starting on the face then spreading to the rest of the body. In Oklahoma, there has only been one case of measles reported since 1993.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms begin to appear about ten to 12 days after exposure to the virus. Persons first experience a fever lasting about two to four days that can peak as high as 103° F to 105° F. This is followed by the onset of cough, runny nose, and/or conjunctivitis (pink eye). The rash usually appears about 14 days after exposure and lasts four to seven days. It begins at the hairline, then involves the face and upper neck. Over the next three days, the rash gradually proceeds downward and outward, reaching the hands and feet. Symptoms may last for one to two weeks. If you think you have symptoms of measles, contact your health care provider or county health department.

What are the complications of measles?

Individuals with measles frequently suffer from diarrhea, ear infections, and/or pneumonia. In certain cases, swelling of the brain or death can occur. It is most dangerous for children under five years of age, adults over 20 years of age, pregnant women, and persons with weakened immune systems.

How are measles spread, and how long can you spread measles to others?

Measles is highly contagious, and is passed from person-to-person by airborne droplets—usually as a result of contagious persons coughing or sneezing. Measles can also be spread by contact with nasal or throat secretions of infected persons, or through surfaces contaminated with these secretions. Infected people can spread the disease usually four days before their rash starts to four days afterwards. If you think you have been exposed to measles please, contact your health care provider or your county health department.

What is the treatment for measles?

There is no treatment for measles, however, health care providers may treat the symptoms of measles with bedrest, plenty of fluids, and anti-fever medications.

How can measles be prevented?

Measles can be prevented with the measles vaccine (usually given in combination with rubella and mumps vaccines, or MMR vaccine), and is recommended for all children at 12 to 15 months of age and again at four to six years of age. If a person has not received a second dose of the vaccine between four to six years of age, it may be given at any age thereafter. The two doses of vaccine normally provide life long immunity.

Is the measles vaccine safe?

Yes, MMR is safe and effective in preventing measles. However, like other medicines, it can cause side effects in some persons. Contact your local health care provider or your county health department for more information about the vaccine.

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Acute Disease Service
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