



**NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S**  
*When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.*

## **Helping Hand™**

*Health Education for Patients and Families*

# **Measles**

Measles, also known as rubeola, is an infection caused by a virus. A virus is a type of germ.

- It is very contagious (spreads easily from person to person). Measles spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes the virus into the air, and someone breathes it in or touches it. The virus goes into their eyes, nose, or mouth.
  - The virus can stay alive in the air and on hard surfaces for several hours.
  - Often, the infected person does not know that they have measles until they feel sick.
  - Symptoms usually develop in 8 to 12 days after a person is exposed to the virus.
  - Measles can be spread to others 4 days before to 4 days after the rash appears.
- Measles can be very serious for some people. It can lead to a bacterial infection such as an ear infection or pneumonia. Those at highest risk for serious illness are:
  - Young children (especially those younger than 5 years of age)
  - Adults over age 20
  - Pregnant people
  - People with a weakened immune system

## **Signs and Symptoms**

- Early symptoms for the first 2 to 4 days:
  - Fever, cough, runny nose, and watery, red eyes like the flu
  - Small red spots with whitish blue centers inside the cheeks

- After a few more days, a rash appears with a high fever.
  - The rash starts as flat and raised deep red spots on the face, behind the ears, and along the hairline. The spots may form into clusters. New, small spots can start on top of other flat spots and the clusters.
  - Within 3 days, as the rash spreads down the body to the feet, the clusters flow into each other to form large, red, flat blotches.
  - The rash lasts 3 to 5 days. It slowly fades to a brownish color, starting first from the face and working down the body. The skin may peel.

## Treatment

- Since measles is a virus, antibiotics will not work.
- Give your child plenty of fluids and rest.
- You can give over-the-counter medicine (OTC) to bring down your child's fever, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®). **Do not give aspirin.**
- Symptoms usually go away in about 2 weeks without treatment.
- If your child has a severe case of measles, they may need to be admitted to the hospital to get large doses of vitamin A. If they also have a bacterial infection, such as pneumonia or an ear infection, they will get antibiotics.

## Preventing Measles

- The best way to prevent getting measles is to be fully vaccinated with the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine. Anyone who is not protected against measles is at risk of getting it.
- Children should have 2 doses:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> dose right after their first birthday (12 to 15 months old).
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> dose before entering kindergarten (4 to 6 years old).
- Some children may need to delay getting the MMR vaccine. Check with your child's doctor or health care provider if you have questions about this.
- Measles is not common in the United States. Most of the outbreaks have been in children who were not fully vaccinated.

- If you're traveling out of the country, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends a different schedule for the MMR vaccine. Talk to your child's doctor or health care provider before traveling.

## **When to Call the Doctor**

If you think your child has measles, call first before going to the doctor or health care provider's office or clinic. You do not want to spread it to others.

Call if your child has been exposed to measles and:

- Is an infant.
- Has not been immunized.
- Has a weakened immune system due to illness or medicines they take.
- Has symptoms that are common to measles.

## **When Your Child May Return to School or Child Care**

- Notify the school or child care if your child has measles. Cases of measles should be reported to the local Health Department.
- Children infected with measles should stay away from others and not attend school or child care until 5 days after the start of the rash.