

Measles Fact Sheet

What is measles?

Measles is an acute disease characterized by fever and rash. Some patients develop pneumonia, and about 1 case in 2,000 is fatal. It is a highly contagious viral disease capable of producing epidemics. Measles is more common in winter and spring.

How common is measles in Oregon?

High vaccination rates means that measles cases are now uncommon in Oregon and in the United States. In 2014, greater than 93 percent of school-age children had received two doses of measles-containing vaccine. Despite repeated introduction of measles into Oregon, we have seen no more than 14 cases in any given year since 1991.

However, in 2014 the United States has seen an increase in measles cases. This increase is largely a result of unimmunized individuals traveling to other countries where measles is common. These individuals may become ill and spread the disease to other unimmunized people when they return home. The large number of cases in 2014 emphasizes the need for everyone to remain vigilant about the threat of measles, especially among unvaccinated communities, and to remember the importance of vaccination to prevent measles.

Who gets measles?

Although measles is usually considered a childhood disease, people of any age who are not fully vaccinated can contract measles. Healthcare professionals and children who are younger than age one and are too young to be vaccinated are especially at risk.

How is measles spread?

Measles is spread when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes. Measles is one of the most contagious of diseases.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles symptoms generally appear in two stages. In the first stage, the individual may have a runny nose, cough and slight fever. The eyes may become reddened and sensitive to light, while the fever consistently rises each day. The second stage consists of a temperature of 103° to 105°F and a blotchy red rash lasting four to seven days. The rash usually begins on the face and then spreads over the entire body.

How soon do symptoms appear?

It usually takes 10-12 days from when a person is exposed to measles to when the first symptom appears, which is most often fever. The measles rash appears around 14 days after exposure, or 2-3 days after the fever begins.

When and for how long is a person able to spread measles?

An individual is able to transmit measles from four days prior to four days after rash onset.

If I think I have been exposed to measles, what should I do?

If you develop a fever and a rash, call your health provider or the local health department. It is important to avoid exposing people who may also be present at a hospital or doctor's office; call ahead first to alert the staff so that they can arrange to see you in a place where other patients or employees won't be exposed.

Does past infection make a person immune?

Yes. Permanent immunity is acquired after contracting the disease.

What is the treatment for measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles.

What are the complications associated with measles?

Pneumonia occurs in up to 6 percent of reported cases and accounts for 60 percent of deaths attributed to measles. Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) may also occur. Other complications include middle ear infection and convulsions. Measles is more severe in infants and adults.

Complications are more common among children younger than 5 years and adults 20 years of age and older.

How can measles be prevented?

Measles can be prevented through vaccination.

In children, the first dose should be given at 12 to 15 months of age. The second dose should be given at 4 to 6 years of age (school entry). MMR vaccine is recommended for all measles vaccine doses to maximize protection against mumps and rubella as well as measles. Measles immunization is required of all children enrolled in child care, preschool and schools programs. Since August 1, 1990, college students have also been required to demonstrate immunity against measles.

Anyone born on or after January 1, 1957, who does not have documentation of adequate vaccination or laboratory evidence of immunity should receive at least one dose of MMR vaccine.