



Measles Fact Sheet

Arkansas Department of Health

What is measles?

Measles is an acute, highly contagious viral disease capable of producing epidemics. Measles is more common in winter and spring.

Who gets measles?

Although measles is usually considered a childhood disease, it can be contracted at any age. Generally, preschool children, adolescents, young adults and inadequately immunized individuals comprise the majority of measles cases in the United States.

How is measles spread?

Measles is spread by direct contact with nasal or throat secretions of infected people or, less frequently, by airborne transmission. Measles is one of the most readily transmitted communicable 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 a slight fever. The eyes may become reddened and sensitive to light while the fever consistently rises each day. The second stage begins on the third to seventh day and consists of a temperature of 103-105°F, and a red blotchy rash lasting four to seven days. The rash usually begins on the face and then spreads over the entire body. Koplik spots (little white spots) may also appear on the gums and inside the cheeks

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear in 10-12 days, although they may occur as early as 8 or as late as 13 days after exposure.

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

An individual is able to transmit measles from two days prior to and five days after rash onset.

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.

How can measles be prevented?

Anyone born on or after January 1, 1957, who does not have a history of physician-diagnosed measles or serologic confirmation of measles immunity, should receive two doses of MMR vaccine for maximum protection. The first dose should be given at 12-15 months of age. The second dose should be given at four to six year of age (school entry) at the same time as the DTP and polio booster doses. MMR vaccine is recommended for all measles vaccine doses to provide increased protection against all three vaccine-preventable diseases: measles, mumps, and rubella. Measles immunization is required of all children enrolled in schools and pre-kindergarten programs. Since August 1, 1990, college students have also been required to demonstrate immunity against measles.