

Frequently Asked Questions

What is measles?

Measles is a very contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. It is a common childhood disease and is considered the most deadly of all childhood rash/fever illnesses.

Who gets measles?

Anyone who has not already had measles or has not received the measles vaccine can get the disease. There are still cases of measles around the world where populations are not vaccinated against the disease.

How do people get measles?

Measles is very easily spread from person to person. Ninety percent of people with close contact with an infected person will get measles, if they were not previously vaccinated. When an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes, the virus is released into the air and enters another person's body through the nose, mouth or throat. People can also become sick if they come in contact with the mucus or saliva (spit) from an infected person. The measles virus can live on infected surfaces for up to two hours.

What are the symptoms of measles?

The symptoms of measles include rash, cough, runny nose and red, watery eyes.

Are there complications with a measles virus infection?

About 20% of reported measles patients experience one or more complications. These complications are more common among children under five years of age and adults over 20 years old. Measles is the leading cause of blindness among African children. Measles kills almost one million children in the world each year.

Other complications from measles infection include:

- Ear infections in nearly one out of every 10 children who get infected
- Pneumonia
- Swelling of the brain
- Miscarriage, pre-mature birth, or a low-birth-weight baby can result in a measles infection among pregnant women

How is measles diagnosed & treated?

A health care provider will observe symptoms and take a blood sample to find out if a person is infected with measles. There is no cure for measles, only supportive treatment (bed rest, fluids and fever reduction). Most patients will recover on their own.

How can measles be prevented?

Measles is a vaccine preventable disease. Getting vaccinated against measles will protect people from getting the disease. The measles vaccine is given in combination with the vaccines for rubella and mumps. This combination vaccine follows a two-dose schedule (one shot at 12 months and a second shot at four to six years of age).

Where can I get more information on measles?

Your health care provider, your local health department, NJ Department of Health and Senior Services <http://www.nj.gov/health> and the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov>