



MEASLES

What is measles?

Measles is a serious, highly contagious disease caused by a virus. The virus is spread easily through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes or by direct contact with infected nose or throat secretions.

How common is measles?

Prior to widespread immunization, measles was common in childhood. In fact, almost everyone born before 1957 has already had measles. Currently, measles usually occurs in preschool-age children who have not had their measles vaccine or in school-age children and young adults who have had only one shot of measles vaccine. Measles occurs primarily in the late winter and early spring.

With effective childhood immunization programs, measles cases in the United States, Canada and other countries have dropped by 99 percent. However, there was a marked increase in measles cases in the United States during 1989-1991. The majority of these cases occurred in non-immunized children, including almost 25 percent of cases in babies younger than 15 months of age. Non-immunized inner-city preschool children were a major contributing factor in this epidemic.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms of measles include a rash that starts on the face and neck and then spreads, a high fever, runny nose, cough and red, watery eyes. The fever starts about 10 days (range seven to 18 days) after exposure. The rash appears about 14 days after exposure. Infants and adults usually are sicker than children and teenagers.

In the United States, death from measles has occurred at a rate of about two to three per 1,000 cases in recent years. These deaths occur mainly in children younger than 5 years of age, primarily from pneumonia and occasionally from encephalitis. Other complications include ear problems, diarrhea and brain damage.

Should a person with measles stay home?

Measles is very contagious, so stay away from work, school and social activities from the time when symptoms are first noticed until five days after the rash appears.

What is the treatment for measles?

Treatment includes bed rest, lots of fluids and medicine for fever and headache. Antibiotics do not help – either to cure measles or to prevent it. There are no anti-viral drugs for treating measles.

Can measles be prevented?

Measles can be prevented with measles vaccine. The vaccine is recommended for children at 12 months of age. This shot is given as measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine. A second shot of measles vaccine, usually MMR, is now required in Illinois for all children kindergarten through 12th grade. Anyone born after January 15, 1957, who has not had at least one dose of measles vaccine after 12 months of age or who has not had the measles should be immunized. Persons working in health care settings should receive two doses of measles vaccine (MMR) unless they have had the disease and, therefore, are immune. Women should not get the vaccine if they are already pregnant or if they plan to get pregnant within three months after getting the vaccine.

Acquired immunity after illness is permanent.

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Illinois Department of Public Health

535 West Jefferson Street

Springfield, Illinois 62761

Phone 217-782-4977

Fax 217-782-3987

TTY 800-547-0466

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