**What are the measles?**

Measles, or rubeola, is a viral infection of the respiratory system. Measles is a very contagious disease that can spread through contact with infected mucus and saliva. An infected person can release the infection into the air when they cough or sneeze.

The measles virus can live on surfaces for several hours. As the infected particles enter the air and settle on surfaces, anyone within close proximity can become infected.

Drinking from an infected person’s glass, or sharing eating utensils with an infected person, increases your risk of infection.

Measles is a leading cause of death in children. Of the 114,900 global deaths related to measles in 2014, the [World Health Organization (WHO)](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs362/en/) reported that most of the victims were under the age of 5.

Contact a doctor immediately if you suspect you have measles. If you have not received a [measles vaccine](https://www.healthline.com/health/mmr-vaccine) and you come into contact with an infected person, visit your doctor to receive a measles vaccine within 72 hours of contact to prevent infection. You can also prevent an infection with a dose of immunoglobulin taken within six days of contact with an infected person.

SYMPTOMS

**What are the symptoms of measles?**

Symptoms of measles generally appear within 14 days of exposure to the virus. Symptoms include:

* [cough](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/cough)
* [fever](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/fever)
* [red eyes](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/eye-redness)
* [light sensitivity](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/photophobia)
* [muscle aches](https://www.healthline.com/health/muscle-aches)
* [runny nose](https://www.healthline.com/health/nasal-discharge)
* [sore throat](https://www.healthline.com/health/sore-throat)
* [white spots inside the mouth](https://www.healthline.com/health/white-spots-on-throat)

A widespread [skin rash](https://www.healthline.com/health/rashes) is a classic sign of measles. This rash can last up to seven days and generally appears within the first three to five days of exposure to the virus.

A measles rash, which appears as red, itchy bumps, commonly develops on the head and slowly spreads to other parts of the body.

RISK FACTORS

**Who is at risk for measles?**

The number of measles cases in the United States has significantly dropped in recent decades due to [immunizations](https://www.healthline.com/health/vaccinations). However, the disease has not been completely eliminated. In fact, there were 189 cases of measles in 2015, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)](http://www.cdc.gov/measles/cases-outbreaks.html).

Measles primarily occurs in unvaccinated children. Some parents choose not to vaccinate their children for fear that vaccines will have adverse effects on their children. Most children and adults who receive a measles vaccine do not experience side effects.

But in rare cases, the vaccine has been linked to [seizures](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/seizures), deafness, brain damage, and [coma](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/coma). It is important to note that these serious side effects from the measles vaccine occur in less than 1 out of every million doses of the vaccine given.

Some parents believe that the measles vaccine can cause [autism](https://www.healthline.com/health/autism) in children. However, numerous studies have proven that there is no link between autism and immunizations.

A [vitamin A deficiency](https://www.healthline.com/health/malnutrition) is also a risk factor for measles. Children with too little vitamin A in their diets have a higher risk of catching the virus.

DIAGNOSIS

**Diagnosing measles**

Your doctor can confirm measles by examining your skin rash and checking for symptoms that are characteristic of the disease, such as white spots in the mouth, fever, cough, and sore throat.

If they are unable to confirm a diagnosis based on observation, your doctor may order a blood test to check for the measles virus.

TREATMENT

**How to treat measles**

There is no prescription medication to treat measles. The virus and symptoms typically disappear within two to three weeks. However, your doctor may recommend:

* [acetaminophen](https://www.healthline.com/drugs/acetaminophen/oral-tablet) to relieve fever and muscle aches
* rest to help boost your immune system
* plenty of fluids (six to eight glasses of water a day)
* [humidifier](https://www.healthline.com/health/humidifiers-and-health) to ease a cough and sore throat
* vitamin A supplements

COMPLICATIONS

**Complications associated with measles**

It is important to receive a measles vaccine because measles can lead to life-threatening complications, such as [pneumonia](https://www.healthline.com/health/pneumonia) and inflammation of the brain ([encephalitis](https://www.healthline.com/health/encephalitis)).

Other complications associated with measles may include:

* [ear infection](https://www.healthline.com/health/ear-infections)
* [bronchitis](https://www.healthline.com/health/bronchitis)
* [miscarriage](https://www.healthline.com/health/miscarriage) or [preterm labor](https://www.healthline.com/health/pregnancy/preterm-labor-signs-symptoms)
* decrease in [blood platelets](https://www.healthline.com/health/thrombocytopenia)
* [blindness](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/blindness)
* severe [diarrhea](https://www.healthline.com/symptom/diarrhea)

OUTLOOK

**Measles outlook**

Measles has a low death rate in healthy children and adults, and most people who contract the measles virus recover fully. The risk of complications is higher in children and adults with a weak immune system.

You cannot get measles more than once. After you’ve had the virus, you are immune for life.

PREVENTION

**How to prevent measles**

Immunizations can help prevent a measles outbreak. The MMR vaccine is a three-in-one vaccination that can protect you and your children from the measles, [mumps](https://www.healthline.com/health/mumps), and [rubella](https://www.healthline.com/health/rubella)(German measles).

Children can receive their first MMR vaccination at 12 months, or sooner if traveling internationally, and their second dose between the ages of 4 and 6. Adults who have never received an immunization can request the vaccine from their doctor.

If you or a family member contracts the measles virus, limit interaction with others. This includes staying home from school or work and avoiding social activities.