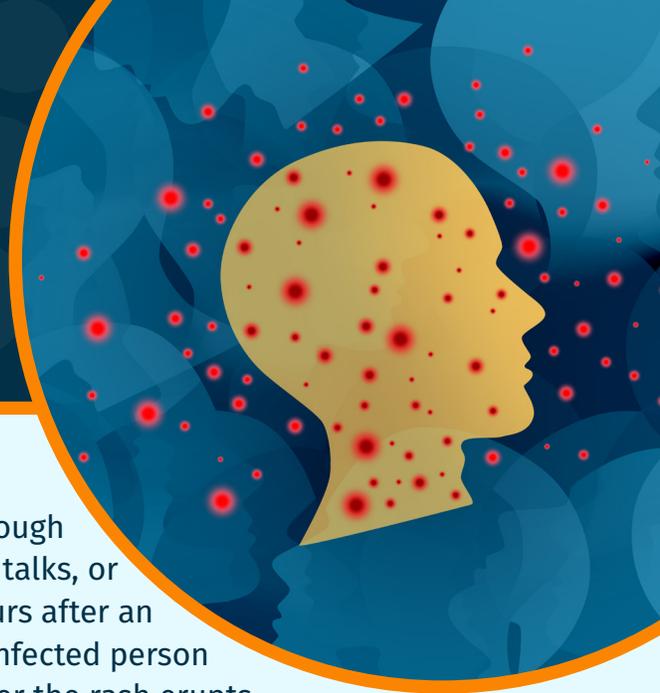


# Measles

## *What You Need to Know*



Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that spreads through airborne droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or even just breathes and can linger in the air for up to two hours after an infected person leaves an area. It can be transmitted by an infected person from four days prior to the onset of the rash to four days after the rash erupts.

This means that a person can be exposed without direct contact. It is such an effective contagion that one individual with measles can infect a dozen others in a vulnerable population. The disease can lead to severe complications, including pneumonia, encephalitis (brain inflammation), and, in rare cases, death.

Before the measles vaccine became widely available, measles caused widespread disease. Today, despite an effective vaccine, outbreaks continue because vaccination rates have declined in parts of the United States. In 2025, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported more than 2,281 confirmed measles cases in the U.S., with the majority occurring in under-vaccinated communities — levels not seen in decades.

## Vaccination Is Effective

The measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine is proven to be extremely effective:

- ▶ **Two doses** are about **97% effective** at preventing measles.
- ▶ **One dose** still offers about **93% effectiveness**.

In contrast, unvaccinated individuals account for the vast majority of cases during recent outbreaks. For example, in many outbreak investigations, **over 90% of cases have been in people without documented vaccination or with unknown vaccination status**.

The United States had maintained measles elimination status for years due to high vaccination coverage. However, recent measles surges threaten this status as vaccine hesitancy has reduced childhood immunization rates below the 95% threshold needed to prevent outbreaks. State policies have also played a part in reduced vaccination rates as they have loosened school vaccination requirements making it easier for parents to opt out of routine vaccinations. Exemption rates are now at a record high.

## Signs and Symptoms

Early recognition of measles symptoms is essential to protecting family, friends, and coworkers. Symptoms typically appear 7–14 days after exposure and may progress quickly.

Common early symptoms include:

- ▶ High fever (often exceeding 101°F)
- ▶ Cough
- ▶ Runny nose
- ▶ Red, watery eyes
- ▶ Small white spots inside the cheeks

The rash begins about 7–18 days after exposure, usually on the face and upper neck. It spreads over about 3 days, eventually to the hands and feet. It usually lasts 5–6 days before fading.

Measles can lead to serious complications, particularly in adults, including:

- ▶ Pneumonia
- ▶ Severe dehydration
- ▶ Brain inflammation
- ▶ Hospitalization

The World Health Organization reports that 1–3 out of every 1,000 measles cases in developed countries can result in death, even with advanced medical care.

## What Can You Do to Help

**Review your vaccination status.** Most adults are protected if they have received two doses of the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine or have confirmed immunity. If you are unsure, your healthcare provider can help determine whether vaccination is needed.

**Get vaccinated if recommended.** The measles vaccine is safe, highly effective, and widely available. The MMR is covered by most health insurers as preventive care when seeing an in-network provider, but please call the customer service number on the back of your card to be sure.

**Stay home if symptoms develop.** If you experience symptoms consistent with measles — such as fever, cough, red eyes, or rash — please do not go to work or send your kids to school. Promptly seek medical care and follow guidance before returning to work or school. You should also let your employer or the school know that others in that area may have been exposed to the measles.



By staying informed, up to date on vaccinations, and mindful of symptoms, you play a vital role in safeguarding your health. If we all work together, we can reduce preventable illnesses like the measles for everyone.

**In 2024, 20.6 million children missed the first lifesaving measles vaccine dose.**