

Measles

General Information and FAQs

What is measles?

- Measles is a viral infection most commonly found in young children who have not been immunised. However, adults can also catch measles if they have not had it before or have not been immunised against it.
- It begins with fever that lasts for a couple of days followed by a cough, runny nose and conjunctivitis (red, sore eyes).
- After a few days a red-brown spotty rash will appear. This starts on the face and upper neck, spreading down the upper body and then extends to the arms, hands, legs and feet.
- After about 5 days the rash starts to fade.

How serious is measles?

- Measles is an unpleasant illness and easily passed from one person to another.
- In some people it can cause complications, such as ear infection, chest infections and even pneumonia.
- In very rare cases some people who get measles can develop serious complications, which can be fatal.

How do you catch measles?

- The measles virus lives in the nose and throat of infected people.
- Measles is caught through direct contact with an infected person, or through the air when he or she coughs or sneezes.
- A person with measles can infect other people from the day before they become unwell until four days after the rash appears.

What to do if you think you have caught measles?

- There is no specific treatment for measles, but the symptoms can be relieved by drinking lots of fluids to replace water lost through the fever. Paracetamol can be used to help reduce the fever if necessary.
- Because measles is so infectious, telephone your local GP Practice or Walk In Centre for advice and further information before attending. Anyone who is very unwell can attend A&E but on arrival must tell staff immediately they may have been in contact with measles.
- Limit your contacts with other people, particularly with:
 - pregnant women
 - infants under 12 months or children who have not had the MMR vaccine
 - people who have weak immune systems
- If you have measles do not go to school or work for four days from when the rash first appeared and inform your school or employer.

Can you prevent measles?

- Yes. Measles can be prevented by a highly effective vaccine. This is part of the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) childhood immunisation programme with a first dose at 12 months and a second dose at 3 years 4 months.
- MMR vaccine can be given to babies from 6 months of age when on-going exposure is likely within the family or nursery setting. If given before 12 months of age the two routine doses will still be required.
- The second dose can be given earlier if your child has been in contact with a case of measles or you are travelling to an area where measles is known to be circulating.
- We strongly recommend that everyone over 12 months of age has the MMR vaccine. It is never too late to receive it. If you are not sure whether you or your children need the MMR vaccine, please talk to your doctor, nurse or health visitor.

Can you tell if you're protected against measles?

- People who have had measles in the past cannot get it again.
- People born before 1970 are likely to have been exposed to measles as a child and have natural immunity.
- People born after 1970 are less likely to have natural immunity and unless they have had two doses of MMR (or another vaccine containing measles) may be at risk of getting measles.
- People who have had two doses of MMR are very unlikely to get measles.
- It is quite safe to have extra doses of MMR, so if there is any doubt, it is better to have an extra dose than to risk not being fully protected.

What if you are pregnant?

- Measles in pregnancy can lead to miscarriage still birth or pre-term delivery.
- MMR should not be given to pregnant women so pregnant women who are in contact with cases of measles should seek advice from their doctor.

What if you have a weak immune system?

- People with weak immune systems, such as those receiving treatment for cancer, who have had an organ transplant or who have other serious medical conditions, can become seriously ill if they catch measles. These people should seek medical advice from their GP if they suspect they have come into contact with a case of measles.

Where can I get more information about measles and the MMR vaccine?

- More information about measles is available from the Health Protection Agency website at: www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/measles/background.htm
- Or from the NHS Choices website at: www.nhs.uk/conditions/Measles/Pages/Introduction.aspx