



MARYLAND Department of Health

Measles Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are the signs and symptoms of measles? How is it spread?

Measles is an acute viral respiratory illness characterized by a high fever, cough, runny nose, and/or conjunctivitis (red watery eyes). A rash typically appears 2-4 days after the initial symptoms, usually starting around the hairline and face and then spreading downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs and feet. The symptoms of measles usually appear about 7 to 14 days after a person is infected. Other symptoms might include small white spots in the mouth, swollen lymph glands, and fatigue. Patients are contagious from 4 days before to 4 days after the rash appears. It is important that people who have measles or might have measles stay home while they are contagious so that they don't expose others. Measles is very infectious and spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can remain in the air for up to 2 hours.

2. Who should be vaccinated?

Measles can be prevented with MMR vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that children get two doses of MMR vaccine. The first dose is routinely given at 12 – 15 months of age, and the second dose at 4 – 6 years of age. Teens and adults should also be up-to-date on the MMR vaccinations. The MMR vaccine is very safe and effective. Two doses of MMR vaccine are about 97% effective at preventing measles; one dose is about 93% effective.

3. Who should not get the MMR vaccine?

There are some people who should NOT get this vaccine or who should talk to their medical provider before getting vaccinated. These include persons who:

- Have any severe, life threatening allergies to a prior dose of MMR vaccine or have a severe allergy to any part of this vaccine
- Is pregnant, thinks she might be pregnant, or is planning to become pregnant in the next month
- Have a weakened immune system due to disease or medical treatment
- Have immediate family members with a history of immune system problems
- Have a condition that makes them bruise or bleed easily
- Have recently had a blood transfusion or received other blood products

- Have tuberculosis
- Have gotten some other vaccines in the past 4 weeks
- Have a moderate or severe illness

4. What are the recommendations if a person is unable to get vaccinated against measles?

Vaccination is the best way to prevent measles. If you are not already vaccinated, and are unable to get the MMR vaccine because of a contraindication, you should be aware of where measles outbreaks are occurring. Check the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/cases-outbreaks.html> for up-to-date information. If you are considering travel to any of these areas, discuss with your healthcare provider.

5. Are “titers” to check immunity to measles recommended for people who have been vaccinated?

If you have documentation of receiving 2 doses of MMR vaccine, you generally do not need to have titers checked.

If you have only 1 dose of MMR vaccine, you can get a second dose without checking titers first.

6. Is preventive treatment recommended for people exposed to measles?

If you think you have been exposed to measles, immediately call your doctor and let him or her know that you have been exposed to someone who has measles. Your doctor can determine if you are immune to measles based on your vaccination record, age, or laboratory evidence, and make special arrangements to evaluate you, if needed, without putting other patients and medical office staff at risk.

If you are not immune to measles, MMR vaccine or a medicine called immune globulin may help reduce your risk of developing measles. Your doctor can help to advise you, and monitor you for signs and symptoms of measles.

No preventive treatment (also called post-exposure prophylaxis) is recommended for exposed healthy persons who have documentation of two doses of MMR vaccine administered on or after the first birthday and given at least 28 days apart.

7. Is a third dose of MMR vaccine recommended for people exposed to measles?

A third dose of MMR to protect against measles is NOT recommended for anyone who has documentation of two doses of MMR administered on or after the first birthday and given at least 28 days apart.

8. Are there any other recommendations regarding measles vaccination in special situations?

The following recommendations are for people who might be at increased risk of measles exposure, including people planning to travel to areas with measles outbreaks (see list of measles outbreaks reported to CDC here: <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/cases-outbreaks.html>), or who might have contact with visitors from these areas:

- Children 6-11 months old: Give an initial MMR vaccine to children 6 months through 11 months of age to help protect them against measles. These children must be revaccinated when they are 12 through 15 months old and again when they are 4 through 6 years of age.
- Children 1-3 years old: Give a second dose of MMR vaccine to children 1 year through 3 years of age who have already received their first MMR vaccine, as long as 28 days have passed since the first MMR vaccine was given to them.
- Adults: In adults born after 1957 who have only received 1 dose of MMR vaccine, give a second dose of vaccine. MMR vaccine can also be given to adults born before 1957 if prior exposure to measles is uncertain.

9. Is there special guidance for pregnant women to prevent measles?

Most pregnant women have been vaccinated with two doses of MMR prior to pregnancy. The effectiveness of two doses of MMR vaccine is approximately 97%.

Pregnant women who have not received two doses of vaccine should not get the MMR vaccine during pregnancy. Pregnant women who need the vaccine should wait until after giving birth. Women should avoid getting pregnant for four weeks after getting the MMR vaccine.

If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant and unsure of whether you have received two doses of MMR vaccine, talk to your healthcare provider.

10. Should new parents and caregivers get vaccinated?

If parents or caregivers haven't gotten the MMR vaccine or had measles in the past, they should get vaccinated. It's important to make sure people who are around your new baby do not expose your baby to measles – and other diseases like whooping cough – that your baby is too young to be vaccinated against. This includes siblings, who should also be up-to-date on all their childhood vaccines for their own protection and to protect the baby.