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Measles in Children, its Symptoms and Treatment

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ABSTRACT

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus. It spreads easily when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes. It can cause severe disease, complications, and even death. Measles can affect anyone but is most common in children. Measles infects the respiratory tract and then spreads throughout the body. Symptoms include a high fever, cough, runny nose and a rash all over the body. Being vaccinated is the best way to prevent getting sick with measles or spreading it to other people. The vaccine is safe and helps your body fight off the virus.

KEYWORDS

running nose, cough, red and watery eyes, small white spots inside the cheeks, ear infections, pneumonia

INTRODUCTION

Measles is one of the world's most contagious diseases, spread by contact with infected nasal or throat secretions (coughing or sneezing) or breathing the air that was breathed by someone with measles. The virus remains active and contagious in the air or on infected surfaces for up to two hours. Up to 9 out of 10 unvaccinated people who come into contact with someone with measles will get sick. A person with measles is contagious from about one day before they start to feel unwell. This is about 4 days before the rash starts. They will need to stay away from all unvaccinated people for at least 4 days after the rash first appeared. For this reason, it is very infectious, and one person infected by measles can infect nine out of 10 of their unvaccinated close contacts. 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. Measles outbreaks can result in severe complications and deaths, especially among young, malnourished children. In countries close to measles elimination, cases imported from other countries remain an important source of infection.

Symptoms of measles usually begin 10–14 days after exposure to the virus. A prominent rash is the most visible symptom.

Early symptoms usually last 4–7 days. They include:

- running nose
- cough
- red and 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.

Most deaths from measles are from complications related to the disease.

Complications can include:

- blindness
- encephalitis (an infection causing brain swelling and potentially brain damage)
- severe diarrhoea and related dehydration
- ear infections
- severe breathing problems including pneumonia.

If a woman catches measles during pregnancy, this can be dangerous for the mother and can result in her baby being born prematurely with a low birth weight. Complications are most common in children under 5 years and adults over age 30. They are more likely in children who are malnourished, especially those without enough vitamin A or with a weak immune system from HIV or other diseases. Measles itself also weakens the immune system and can make the body “forget” how to protect itself against infections, leaving children extremely vulnerable.

Diagnose of measles

Doctor may be able to diagnose your child’s measles from their symptoms and history of possible exposure to measles.

They may confirm the diagnosis with:

- a sample taken from their nose or throat
- a [urine \(wee\) test](#)
- a [blood test](#)

Measles is considered a [notifiable disease](#). If your child has measles, your doctor will notify your local public health unit. They may ask to talk with you to try and find out where your child caught measles. They may also ask who your child has been in contact with ([contact tracing](#)). This helps limit the spread of measles and protects your community.

People at particular risk from measles are unvaccinated [pregnant women](#) and young babies (those under 12 months of age).

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for measles. Caregiving should focus on relieving symptoms, making the person comfortable and preventing complications. Drinking enough water and treatments for dehydration can replace fluids lost to diarrhoea or vomiting. Eating a healthy diet is also important. Doctors may use antibiotics to treat pneumonia and ear and eye infections. All children or adults with measles should receive two doses of vitamin A supplements, given 24 hours apart. This restores low vitamin A levels that occur even in well-nourished children. It can help prevent eye damage and blindness. Vitamin A supplements may also reduce the number of measles deaths.

Conclusion, the best protection against measles is [vaccination](#). Your child should receive 2 doses of measles vaccine. This should happen at:

- 12 months of age — as part of the ‘measles, mumps, rubella vaccine’ vaccine (MMR)
- 18 months of age — as part of the measles-mumps-rubella-varicella vaccine (MMRV)

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