

## ***Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): Measles (Rubeola)***

### **What is measles?**

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease caused by the measles virus. It spreads easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing, or close contact with an infected person. The virus can remain in the air and on surfaces for up to **two hours** after an infected person leaves an area.

### **What are the symptoms of measles?**

Symptoms usually appear **7–14 days after exposure** and include:

- High fever (may reach 104°F or higher)
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Tiny white spots inside the mouth (Koplik spots)
- A red, blotchy rash that usually starts on the face and spreads to the rest of the body

### **How serious is measles?**

Measles can lead to severe complications, especially in young children, pregnant people, and individuals with weakened immune systems. Complications may include:

- Ear infections and diarrhea
- Pneumonia (most common cause of death from measles in young children)
- Encephalitis (swelling of the brain)
- Hospitalization or, rarely, death

### **How does measles spread?**

Measles spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. You can catch it by breathing contaminated air or touching a surface with the virus and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. A person with measles is contagious **four days before** and **four days after** the rash appears.

## What counts as an exposure?

Sharing the **same indoor air** with a person who is infectious with measles (e.g., classroom, home, clinic waiting room) **or entering that space within 1 hour after they leave**. (CDC often uses a 2-hour window; evidence beyond 60 minutes is limited.)

- **Masks don't eliminate exposure.** Exposure criteria apply even if the infectious person was masked.

## How can measles be prevented?

The best way to prevent measles is through vaccination:

- **MMR vaccine** (measles, mumps, rubella) is safe and effective.
- Two doses are **97% effective** at preventing measles.
  - First dose: 12–15 months of age
  - Second dose: 4–6 years of age

Adults who are unsure of their vaccination status or were born after 1957 should check with their healthcare provider about getting vaccinated.

## What should I do if I think I've been exposed?

If you have been exposed to measles:

- **Call your healthcare provider before visiting**—to avoid spreading the virus to others.
- Your provider may recommend vaccination or an immune globulin injection if given within a few days of exposure.
- Stay home and avoid public places until you've been cleared by public health authorities.

## When to Alert Public Health

Anyone with **fever ( $\geq 101^{\circ}\text{F}$ )**, **cough/runny nose/red eyes**, and a **rash that starts on the face and spreads downward**, **OR** any compatible symptoms **plus** travel, airport, theme park, or contact with international visitors in the past **21 days** should call public health/clinic **before arriving** to avoid exposing others.

## Can people who are vaccinated still get measles?

It is rare, but people who have received only one dose or have weakened immune systems can still get measles. However, the illness is usually milder and less likely to cause complications.

## **Why are we seeing measles cases again?**

Measles has been increasing in recent years due to:

- Travel from countries where measles is still common.
- Declines in vaccination rates.

Even a small drop in vaccination coverage can lead to outbreaks.

## **Where can I get more information or vaccines?**

- **Riverside University Health System – Public Health:** <https://ruhealth.org/public-health/immunization-program>
- **California Department of Public Health:**  
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/measles.aspx>
- **CDPH Quicksheet on measles**  
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Immunization/Measles-Quicksheet.pdf>