

10 Things to Know About Measles

1. Measles, which is caused by a virus, is one of the most infectious diseases known to mankind. Two types of measles exist—each caused by a different virus. The most common type of measles (typically referred to as either "red measles" or just "measles") is caused by the rubella virus. The other type of measles (also referred to as "German measles") is caused by the rubella virus. Although this form of measles usually is somewhat milder than red measles, it can give rise to birth defects if a pregnant woman with the disease passes the virus to her unborn child.
2. About 20 million people globally (mostly children) get measles annually, primarily in the developing areas of Africa and Asia. With few exceptions, the disease seldom occurs in the United States. With a fatality rate of 2 to 3 per 1,000, more than 145,000 measles-related deaths happen every year around the world — a number that translates to approximately 400 deaths daily or 16 deaths every hour.
3. An airborne disease, measles spreads relatively easily either through the coughs and sneezes of someone who is infected or by close personal or direct contact with infected throat or nasal secretions. In fact, the virus remains contagious for as long as 2 hours on infected surfaces.
4. The red rash that normally is associated with measles is not the initial sign the disease has victimized yet another person. As a rule, the first symptom of measles (fever) will occur about 10 to 12 days after a person's initial exposure to the virus. Concurrently, the individual infected with measles can experience a runny nose, a cough, and small white spots inside the cheeks, loss of appetite, malaise, and red and watery eyes. A few days later, a rash erupts, which typically will spread over the entire body and lasts for 5 to 6 days before fading.
5. Having measles is not without complications. In that regard, the drawbacks can range from the very common (e.g., diarrhea) to the serious (e.g., pneumonia, mouth ulcers, bronchitis, and ear infections). In relatively rare instances, some children with measles develop swelling on their brain, which can lead to convulsions, loss of hearing, and mental retardation.
6. No specific treatment for measles exists. Fortunately, most individuals with measles will recover within a few days or weeks. In the event that a person experiences certain virus-related complications, such as an eye or ear infection, bronchitis, sinusitis, or bacterial pneumonia, antibiotics can be prescribed for that individual. If the measles patient appears to become even sicker (which may be an indication that the person is developing complications), it is important that they seek medical advice.
7. The single most important step that an individual can take to be protected from measles is to be vaccinated. Contrary to the ungrounded hysteria that often accompanies the issue of whether to vaccinate someone for measles, the MMR vaccine is safe, effective, and inexpensive (i.e., less than a dollar to immunize a child). The MMR vaccine contains live

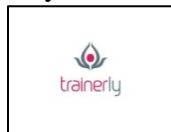
weakened strains of the measles, mumps, and rubella viruses. These live viruses stimulate the production of antibodies in the body that subsequently preclude full-blown viruses from taking hold going forward.

8. Considerable evidence exists that supports the protective value of children, adolescents, and adults born after 1956 receiving two doses of the MMR vaccine. For children, the recommended range for the first dose (which produces immunity to measles and rubella in 90% to 95% of recipients) is from 12 to 15 months. The second dose, which is usually given before the child enters kindergarten or first grade, is intended to help produce immunity in those recipients who did not respond to the first dose.
9. Because the number of children who receive the MMR vaccine in the United States is relatively high, measles is extremely rare in the United States. Unfortunately, some parents refuse to allow their children to be vaccinated. In 2015, such anti-vaccination sentiment played a definitive role in a measles outbreak that erupted, with Disneyland as the attributed ground zero. Initially, more than 40 unvaccinated children were exposed to measles in the "happiest place on earth." In turn, these individuals returned home, spreading the measles virus to other unvaccinated children in the process.
10. In theory, the measles virus could be eliminated from the face of the earth entirely. An effective vaccine against the disease exists. Furthermore, accurate diagnostic tests to identify the disease are available readily. In addition, because animals do not carry the virus, an entire animal species would not have to be eradicated. Unfortunately, however, if people do not take the vaccine, for whatever reason, getting rid of the disease for good will never become a reality.

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