

What is measles?

Measles (Rubeola), is caused by a virus. It is a serious illness that is highly communicable.

What are symptoms of measles?

Measles symptoms include high fever (up to 105 degrees F), cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes. After 2 or 3 days, tiny white spots (called Koplik spots) may appear in the mouth and a raised red rash begins, usually on the face. The rash spreads rapidly over the neck, upper arms, and chest. Later it spreads over the back, abdomen, rest of the arms, thighs, legs and feet. The rash usually lasts 4 to 7 days. Measles can lead to hearing loss, pneumonia, brain damage, and even death.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Early symptoms usually appear 8-12 days after exposure. The rash usually begins about 14 days after exposure.

How is measles spread?

Measles is spread from person-to-person by infected droplets from the mouth, nose, and throat of a person with measles. Droplets can be spread through the air or directly onto another person's hands and face through coughing and sneezing.

How is measles diagnosed and treated?

Measles is diagnosed through blood tests as well as by urine or nasal cultures. There is no treatment for measles because it is a virus.

How long is a person infectious (contagious)?

Persons with measles are contagious from 1 to 2 days before the onset of symptoms (or 5 days before the rash begins) to 4 days after the rash appears.

How can I prevent a measles illness?

Measles is a vaccine-preventable disease. Measles vaccine is available in combination with rubella and mumps vaccine in the MMR vaccine. Washington State immunization law requires that all children have a record of 2 immunizations against measles. The first dose of measles vaccine should be given at 12 to 15 months of age. A second dose of MMR is recommended routinely at age 4-6 years. The second dose must be given at least 4 weeks after the first dose. MMR vaccine may also be given within 72 hours after an exposure to measles.

Persons born before 1957 are generally considered immune to measles because they probably had the disease before measles vaccine was widely used. Persons who were vaccinated between 1957 and 1968 should be revaccinated due to the use of an ineffective vaccine during that time.

What can I do if I'm exposed to measles?

If you are exposed to someone who has measles, consult your health care provider immediately.

Cases of suspected measles should be reported immediately.

Measles is a Washington State reportable disease and must be reported to the local health department. In Snohomish County, contact Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response at 425.339.5278, Monday-Friday, 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM.

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Communicable Disease Surveillance & Response

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