

Information on Measles

Measles is a serious, highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. The virus is spread easily through the air when the infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes or by direct contact with infected nose or throat secretions. The measles virus can remain infectious on surfaces and in the air up to two hours after an infected person leaves the area.

Prior to widespread immunization, Measles was common in childhood. In fact, almost everyone born before 1957 has already had measles.

A majority of the cases we are now seeing in the United States is due to international traveling to areas where measles is epidemic, and in populations where there is a low vaccination rate against the disease and through contact with a person who has the virus.

One dose of the MMR vaccine can offer 93% effective coverage if exposed to the virus and two doses given at least 28 days apart provide 97% effectiveness.

In the past it was believed by some that the measles vaccine was linked with Autism, however numerous studies have proven that this is not the case.

Current CDC recommendations include that children of one year to 15 months receive a dose followed by a booster dose between the ages of four to 6 years.

Patients with upcoming international travel, especially to countries with endemic measles or area that are experiencing outbreaks, should check their vaccine record to ensure that they are up to date on any necessary vaccines. You are able to find the areas of endemic/outbreak by looking at : CDC.gov

Symptoms of measles starts with a fever (usually starts on day 10 and last from 7 to 18 days) after exposure, runny nose, cough, red eyes, and sore throat. Followed by a rash that appears around 14 days after exposure that spreads all over the body, most often starting on the head. The symptoms of measles generally appear seven to 14 days after a person is exposed but can appear up to 21 days after exposure. Patients are considered contagious from four days before and four days after the rash appears.

Complications of the virus may be life threatening especially in infants too young to vaccinate, pregnant women and those individuals with a weakened immune system. Measles can lead to Pneumonia, swelling of the brain, ear problems, blindness, and death (In the US the rate is 2-3 deaths per 1000 cases).

Studies have shown that one person with measles will infect 12-18 others that are at risk due to being unvaccinated. If you believe that you may be experiencing symptoms of measles call your provider first before going into their office or the emergency room as precautions to protect others may be needed. Measles is very contagious, so stay away from work, school and social activities from the time when symptoms are first noticed until five days after the rash appears.

Treatment includes bed rest, lots of fluids and medicine for fever and headache. Antibiotics do not help to either cure or prevent it. There are no anti-viral drugs for treating measles.

CDC/IDPH

