



Say No to Infection Measles Fact Sheet

What is Measles?

Measles is a notifiable infectious disease transmitted via the respiratory route. Measles is caused by a virus and spreads easily when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes. Measles can be severe, particularly in immunosuppressed individuals and young infants.

The basic reproduction rate is estimated between 15-20, for example, for every 1 case, 15-20 individuals will be infected.

Even though a safe and cost-effective vaccine is available, in 2023 there were an estimated 107 500 measles deaths globally, mostly among unvaccinated or under vaccinated children under the age of 5 years.

Measles vaccination averted more than 60 million deaths between 2000 and 2023.



The most effective way to control measles is by vaccination. The vaccine is safe and helps the body to fight off the virus. Before the introduction of the measles vaccine in 1963, major epidemics occurred approximately every 2 to 3 years and caused an estimated 2.6 million deaths each year.

Measles is endemic in many countries and globally it is estimated that one million children die from it each year, mostly in developing countries.

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.

What is the incubation period?

The incubation period is typically around 10-12 days from exposure to onset of symptoms but can vary from 7 – 21 days.

You can easily catch measles by:

- Breathing in these droplets.

- Touching a surface, the droplets have settled on and then placing your hands near your mouth or nose (the virus can survive on surfaces for a few hours).
- People with measles are infectious from when the symptoms develop until about 4 days after the rash first appears.

What are the symptoms?

- Cold like symptoms, such as a runny nose, sneezing and a cough.
- Sore, red eyes that may be sensitive to light.
- A high temperature (fever), which may reach around 40C.
- Lack of appetite
- Tiredness, irritability, and a general lack of energy.
- Dry harsh cough.
- Small white spots may appear inside the cheeks and on the back of the lips a few days later. These spots usually last a few days.
- Small greyish-white spots on the inside of the cheeks, a few days later, a red brown blotchy rash will appear. This usually starts on the head or upper neck before spreading outwards to the rest of the body.

How to avoid spreading or catching measles?

Measles is spread when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes.

You're infectious from when you first have symptoms (around 4 days before the rash appears) until 4 days after you get the rash.

Do

- ✓ wash your hands often with soap and warm water
- ✓ use tissues when you cough or sneeze
- ✓ throw used tissues in the bin



How is measles treated?

There is no specific medicine that kills the measles virus. Treatment aims to ease symptoms until the body's immune system clears the infection. For most cases, rest and simple measures to reduce a fever are all that are needed for a full recovery. The following measures are useful:

- **Rest:** Get enough rest
- **Drink fluids:** Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration from diarrhoea or vomiting.
- **Eat well:** Eat a healthy diet.
- **Take fever reducers:** Take pain relief to reduce a temperature, aches and pains.
- **Isolate:** Stay away from others and isolate at home.
- **Close curtains:** Close curtains to reduce sensitivity to light.
- **Clean eyes:** Use damp cotton wool to clean under the eyes.

Doctors may use antibiotics to treat pneumonia and ear and eye infections.

All children or adults with measles should receive 2 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.

[Please click on the link for Measles national guidance.](#)

