



What is measles disease?

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that occurs most often in the late winter and spring. A high fever and a red rash covering most of the body develops in almost every case. Measles can also cause pneumonia, deafness, inflammation of the brain and death.

Who gets measles?

Anyone, regardless of age, who has not had measles or has not been adequately immunized may get the disease. Most cases occur in unimmunized preschoolers and young adults.

How is measles spread?

The measles virus resides in the mucus in the nose and throat of infected people. When they sneeze or cough, droplets spray into the air and the droplets remain active and contagious in the air and on infected surfaces for up to two hours. People with measles can spread the disease starting 4 days before until 4 days after the rash begins.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms begin about ten days after being exposed to measles. It begins with a fever that lasts for a couple of days, followed by a cough, runny nose, and conjunctivitis (pink eye). A rash starts on the face and upper neck, spreads down the back and trunk, then extends to the arms and hands, as well as the legs and feet. After about five days, the rash fades the same order it appeared. Severe cases may lead to pneumonia, deafness, inflammation of the brain, and death.

What is the treatment for measles?

Bed rest is advisable while the patient has a fever. Infants with very high fever and children with headaches should be seen and treated by a doctor.

Is there a measles vaccine?

Yes. The measles vaccine is recommended for children at 12 to 15 months of age. The vaccine is given as part of the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. A second dose of measles vaccine, usually given as MMR vaccine, is now required for all children at entry to kindergarten (4 to 6 years old). Anyone born in 1957 or later should get measles vaccine (or find out if they are immune) if they work in a setting where they may get exposed, such as health care settings. Women should not get the vaccine if they are already pregnant or plan to get pregnant within 3 months after getting vaccinated.

What should I do if I've been exposed to measles?

If you or anyone in your house has signs of measles, or if you have been in contact with someone who has measles, call the health department or your doctor. The measles vaccine may prevent illness if you receive it within 3 days of contact with the measles virus, and another medication called immune globulin (Ig) may prevent illness if you receive it within 6 days. Always call your doctor first before visiting the office so steps can be taken to prevent the spread of measles to other people in the office.

How can the spread of measles be stopped?

The best way to stop measles is to immunize all children at 12 to 15 months of age with measles vaccine. A second dose of measles vaccine between 4 and 6 years of age or before starting kindergarten is required for children entering school in Iowa. Adults born after 1956 also need a total of two doses of measles vaccine. People with measles should be kept away from people who are not immune until they are well again.

Where can I get the measles vaccine?

Children and adults may receive measles vaccine from the health department or from a doctor's office.