

IMMUNIZATION – MEASLES

Childhood immunization has been called our society's greatest health care achievement and has helped children stay healthy for more than 50 years. Some diseases that once sickened or killed thousands of children have been eliminated completely and others are close to being eradicated. However, one disease that is rarely heard of is making an unfortunate comeback with one of the worst outbreaks in the past decade, due to the fact that many children not being immunized against it – Measles.

MEASLES IS HIGHLY CONTAGIOUS

Measles is transmitted by coughing and sneezing with germs remaining in the air for hours. It's so contagious that if one person has it, 9 of 10 individuals close to that person who aren't immune will also become infected.

STAGES

The infection occurs in sequential stages over a period of 2 to 3 weeks.

- Infection and incubation. For the first 10 to 14 days after being infected, the measles virus incubates and there are usually no signs of symptoms.
- Symptoms typically begin with a mild to moderate fever, often accompanied by a persistent cough, runny nose, inflamed eyes, and sore throat. This stage may last 2 to 3 days.
- About 4 days after the onset of symptoms, a rash appears on the face, particularly behind the ears and along the hairline. The rash consists of tiny white spots with bluish-white centers on a red background, some slightly raised.
- Over the next few days, the rash spreads down the arms and trunk, then over the thighs, lower legs and feet. At the same time, fever rises sharply, often as high as 104 to 105 F. The measles rash gradually recedes, fading first from the face and last from the thighs and feet.
- Communicable period: A person with measles can spread the virus to others for about 8 days, starting 4 days before the rash appears and ending when the rash has been present for 4 days.

- There is no specific treatment for measles and most people recover within a few weeks. But in children under 1 year of age, poor and malnourished children, and individuals with reduced immunity, measles can cause serious complications including blindness, encephalitis, severe diarrhea, ear infection leading to deafness, pneumonia, and even death.

The MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella) vaccine is safe and effective at preventing measles. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends all children receive two doses of MMR vaccine, starting at 12-15 months of age. Adults should receive the MMR vaccine if they do not have evidence of immunity

Call your doctor if you think you or your child may have been exposed to measles or if you or your child has a rash resembling measles. If your doctor says that your child has measles, contact your child's school and other recent contacts immediately to report your child's illness.

If you or your child has not been immunized against measles, contact your physician for vaccine guidance. (You need at least 1 dose of MMR if you were born in 1957 or later.) For more information on immunization, download the Colorado PTA Health, Wellness & Safety Parent Information Sheet entitled "Immunization Awareness" on the Colorado PTA web site www.copta.org.

RESOURCES TO CONTACT & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/measles/>)
- American Academy of Pediatrics (<http://www2.aap.org/immunization/illnesses/mmc/measles/html>)
- Kids Health (<http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/lung/measles.html>)
- Immunize for Good (<http://www.immunizeforgood.com>)
- Spanish-speaking parents can access information at <http://www.vacunalosporsubien.com>.