

# IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

## MEASLES

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by the measles virus. The virus normally grows in the back of the throat and in the cells that line the lungs. Although measles is usually considered a childhood disease, people can get it at any age. Because of vaccinations, few people in the United States get measles today.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of measles begin 10-12 days after contact with an infected person and include:

- The first symptoms are runny nose, cough, slight fever, and watery red eyes that are sensitive to light.
- After 3-7 days, these symptoms may appear:
  - Fever up to 103-105°
  - Red, blotchy rash, usually beginning on the face and spreads over the entire body
  - Little white spots on the gums and inside of the cheeks
- The rash and other symptoms usually last for a few days and then go away.

### Transmission

- The virus lives in the nose and throat of an infected person. When that person sneezes or coughs, droplets with virus spray into the air. The virus can land in other people's noses or throats when they breathe or put their fingers in their mouth or nose after handling an infected surface.
- The virus remains active and contagious on infected surfaces for up to 2 hours.
- Measles spreads so easily that anyone who is not immunized with it will probably get sick if they come in contact with someone who has the virus.
- A person with measles is contagious from 4 days before the rash starts to 4 days after. Therefore, people with measles should stay away from others until at least 4 days have passed since the rash first appeared.

### Treatment

- There is no specific treatment for measles.
- About one out of 10 children with measles gets an ear infection, which may cause hearing loss. Up to one out of 20 gets pneumonia. About one out of 1,000 gets encephalitis (infection of the brain), and one or two out of 1,000 die. Encephalitis can cause brain damage and result in long-term disabilities.
- Measles also can make a pregnant woman have a miscarriage, give birth prematurely, or have a low-birth-weight baby.

### Prevention

- Measles can be prevented through vaccination. The measles vaccine is combined with the vaccines for mumps and rubella and is known as the MMR vaccine.
- Measles vaccine is usually given to toddlers when they are 12 to 15 months of age, and then again at 4 to 6 years of age. People born before 1957 are generally considered immune because they probably had the disease before measles vaccine was widely used.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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