



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Measles

(Rubeola)

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious rash illness caused by a virus. Although measles is commonly thought of as a childhood disease, people of any age can get it. Possible complications of measles are pneumonia, inflammation of the brain (encephalitis), ear infections, diarrhea, seizures and death. These complications are more common in children under age 5 and adults over age 20. Measles can be prevented with a vaccination.

How do you get it?

Measles is spread through the air by droplets and by direct exposure to mucus from the nose and throat of a person infected with the measles virus. The virus can remain contagious on surfaces for up to 2 hours.

What are the symptoms of measles?

The symptoms usually occur in two stages. The first stage begins with a high fever, runny nose, cough and conjunctivitis (pink eye). In the second stage, a red blotchy rash appears and usually lasts for 5 to 6 days. The rash commonly begins on the face and then spreads to the rest of the body.

When do symptoms start?

The fever, runny nose, and cough usually appear 10 days after exposure to the virus, but the onset can range from 7 to 18 days. The rash follows 3 to 7 days after the beginning of the first symptoms.

For how long is a person with measles contagious?

A person is contagious from just before the first symptoms appear to 4 days after the start of rash.

What is the treatment for measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Care of patients with measles consists mainly of providing plenty of water and food, bed rest, and acetaminophen (Tylenol) for fever control.

Is there a vaccine for measles?

Yes. All children should receive 2 doses of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. The first dose should be given at 12-15 months of age. A second dose is recommended at 4 to 6 years of age. Measles vaccination is required for all children before enrollment in any school in Hawaii (preschool through college). Unvaccinated adults born after 1956 should receive at least one dose of measles vaccine, unless they have had a blood test showing they are immune to measles. Adults at increased risk of getting measles (college students, international travelers, and health care workers) should receive two doses, at least 4 weeks apart.

Should a person with measles stay home from work or school?

Yes. Any person diagnosed with measles should stay away from school or work for 4 days after the rash begins.

How can you keep from getting it?

The best way to keep from getting measles is to get vaccinated.

Pregnant women and people with a life threatening allergic reaction to gelatin, neomycin, or a previous dose of MMR vaccine should not receive the MMR vaccine. Persons with immune system problems or who are moderately or severely ill should consult with their doctor about whether they should be vaccinated.

For more information, see the CDC's website at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenu/sub_measles.htm