

## **Measles (Rubeola)**

### **What is measles?**

Measles is a severe illness caused by a virus. It is spread from person to person very easily and can produce epidemics of illness. Before the vaccine became available, over 90% of children under 20 years of age had been infected with measles. Now the disease is not very common.

### **Who gets measles?**

Although measles is usually considered a childhood disease, people of any age can catch it. In the United States most cases are in pre-school children, teenagers, young adults and individuals who are not well immunized.

### **How is the virus spread?**

The measles virus is spread through the air or by direct contact with nose or throat discharges from someone who is infected. Measles is one of the most contagious diseases.

### **What are the symptoms of measles?**

Measles symptoms usually appear in two stages. In the first stage, most people have a fever of greater than 101 degrees, runny nose, red, watery eye(s) and cough. The second stage begins around the third to seventh day when a red blotchy rash begins to appear on the face and spread over the entire body. Little white spots, called Koplik's spots, may also be seen on the gums and inside of the cheeks.

### **What are the complications associated with measles?**

Middle ear infections, pneumonia, diarrhea and encephalitis (infection of the brain) may occur in a small percentage of cases but death due to measles is very rare in the United States. Measles is more severe in young infants and adults, particularly pregnant women.

### **How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms usually begin within an average of 10 days, but may appear anytime between 7 and 21 days after exposure. The rash usually appears within 14 days of exposure.

### **How long is someone contagious?**

A person can spread the disease from just before the onset of the fever to about 4 days after the appearance of the rash. Measles is usually spread by contact with an infected person, through coughing and sneezing. Therefore, it is important to keep children out of school until at least 4

days after the rash develops. If one person has the disease, 90% of their susceptible close contacts will also become infected with the measles virus. The virus remains active and contagious on infected surfaces for up to 2 hours.

### **What is the treatment for measles?**

There is no specific treatment for measles.

### **Can a person who had measles get it again?**

No. Persons who have had measles do not get it again.

### **How can measles be prevented?**

Immunization of as many children as possible is the best way to prevent measles. Two doses of measles vaccine are recommended for all children. The first dose of the measles, mumps, rubella vaccine (MMR) should be given at 12-15 months of age and the second dose before the child begins kindergarten.

A person with measles should stay away from school, day care, or other settings where others could be exposed for at least four days after the rash appears.

### **Who needs to be vaccinated?**

Generally, anyone 18 years of age or older, who was born after 1956, should get at least one dose of MMR vaccine, unless they can show that they have either had the vaccines or the diseases. Adults at increased risk for exposure to measles include college students, international travelers, and healthcare personnel.