

What you need to know about measles

This year, the U.S. has seen the biggest measles outbreak since 1994. Measles was declared eliminated in the year 2000, but in recent years measles has come back.

THIS OUTBREAK IS DUE TO TWO MAIN FACTORS:

1. **Many people travel abroad.** They may travel to a place where measles is common. They catch measles there and bring it back to the U.S. with them. They may not even know they have measles until several days after they return.
2. **Some people in the U.S. do not get the measles vaccine.** If they are exposed, they get sick and can spread measles to others.



DANGEROUSLY EASY TO CATCH

Measles is highly contagious. It spreads through the air. An infected person can simply breathe and spread measles. It can also be spread through coughing and sneezing.

You don't even have to be near a person with measles to catch it from them. Measles stays in the air for a long time. In fact, you could go into a room two hours after an infected person has left and still catch measles.

Many times, people spread measles before they even know they have it.

Almost everyone who hasn't gotten the measles vaccine will catch measles if they are exposed.

KNOW THE SIGNS

- Very high fever (this usually comes first)
- Cough, runny nose and red eyes
- Diarrhea
- Ear infection
- Rash of tiny red spots, usually starting at the head and spreading all over

SERIOUS COMPLICATIONS

Serious problems can happen to a person who catches measles, especially babies and young children. This includes:

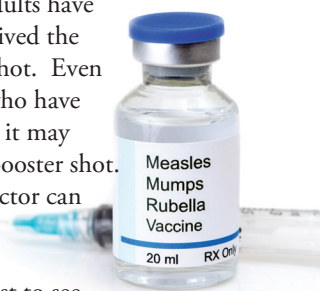
- Pneumonia (a serious lung infection)
- Brain swelling (encephalitis)
- Permanent brain damage
- Deafness
- Death

GET THE SHOT

The best way to avoid getting measles is to get the measles vaccine. This can also keep you from spreading it to babies who are too young to get the shot.

Two doses of the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) shot are 97 percent effective in preventing measles. Children should get the first dose at 12 to 15 months of age. They get the second dose at 4 to 6 years of age.

Some adults have not received the MMR shot. Even adults who have received it may need a booster shot. Your doctor can perform a simple blood test to see if you are immune to measles.



Ask your doctor if you need the measles vaccine or if you should have the blood test done. The MMR vaccine is very safe and it works. Most health insurance covers the cost of the vaccine. If you have any concerns, discuss them with your doctor.

Sources: American Medical Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention