

# What Head Start Parents Should Know About Measles

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## What Are Measles?

Measles are a serious illness caused by a virus. The virus can last for one to two weeks. It is rare today because most children are immunized against it. However, the number of diagnosed cases has grown across the country. This increase is attributed to children not being vaccinated.

## What Are the Signs of Measles?

Measles starts with a fever that can get very high. Some of the other symptoms that may occur are:

- Fatigue
- Cough, runny nose, and red eyes
- Rash of tiny, red spots that usually lasts five to six days and begins at the hairline, moves to the face and upper neck, and proceeds down the body
- Diarrhea
- Ear infection

If you see these symptoms, see your doctor immediately.

## How Does Measles Spread?

Measles spreads when a person infected with the measles virus breathes, coughs, or sneezes. It is very contagious from five days before until four days after the start of the rash. After exposure, it can take one to two weeks for the person to get sick.

Measles can spread by being in a room with a person with measles and up to two hours after that person is gone. It can also spread from an infected person even before they have a measles rash. Almost everyone who has not had the measles vaccine will get measles if they are exposed to the measles virus. People who have had measles or were immunized usually can't catch it again.

## Who Is at Risk?

Measles can be dangerous, especially for babies, young children, and pregnant women. For some children, measles can lead to:

- Pneumonia (a serious lung infection)
- Lifelong brain damage
- Deafness
- Death

Pregnant women with measles have a greater chance of severe illness and complication. Measles can also affect people who may have immune system problems from HIV, AIDS, and cancer chemotherapy. Those who have received an organ transplant or take steroid medication are also at risk.

## How Are Measles Diagnosed?

Measles is diagnosed by the symptoms and a special blood test. If you suspect your child has measles, you should have your child see his or her doctor.

## Should My Child with Measles Be Excluded from Head Start?

Children diagnosed with measles should remain out of the center until a doctor determines the child is no longer infectious. Your child's Head Start center might ask for a note from your doctor to clear your child to return.

## How to Stop the Spread of Measles?

- Make sure your child is up to date with their vaccinations. All children should get two doses of MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine starting at 1 year of age. Some teens may also need MMR vaccine, if they didn't get the two doses when they were younger.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact such as kissing, hugging, and sharing cups, or using eating utensils and food with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect household surfaces such as countertops, doorknobs, sinks, and toilets.
- If you provide care to other children who are sick, wear gloves when touching mucus from the nose or saliva.
- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and changing diapers.
- Stay home when sick or consulting your doctor.
- Families can help the child recover by encouraging rest, nutrition, and plenty of healthy fluids to drink.

## How to Talk to Children about Measles

- If children have questions, take time to listen and answer their questions.
- Be honest. Answer questions based on the facts and as age-appropriate.
- Speak in a calm tone of voice, using reassuring words.
- Keep your child up to date on the state Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) schedule.

## Where Can I Learn More?

- [Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers on talking with children about infectious disease outbreaks](#)

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