

Measles/Rubeola

Fact Sheet



Paul R. LePage, Governor

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What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. The disease is also called rubeola.

About one out of 10 children with measles also gets an ear infection; one out of 20 children gets pneumonia. For every 1,000 children who get measles, one or two will die of organ failure or brain swelling.

What are the signs and symptoms of measles?

Measles infection causes a high fever and rash. The rash usually begins on a person's face at the hairline and spreads downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs, and feet. When the rash appears, a person's fever may spike to more than 104 degrees Fahrenheit. Measles virus normally grows in the cells that line the back of the throat and lungs.

How is measles spread?

Measles spreads through the air by breathing, coughing or sneezing. It is so contagious that any child or adult who is exposed to it and is not immune will probably get the disease.

How will I know if I have a measles infection?

Your health care provider may take swabs from your nose and throat. The measles virus can be detected in these samples. Your provider may also take a blood sample to see if your body is producing antibody to measles virus.

How is measles treated?

Treatment is supportive and may include antibiotics for ear or lung infections and medication for brain swelling.

How can I prevent measles?

Combination vaccines are available for children over 12 months of age and for adults. Speak to a healthcare provider for advice on vaccines.

What about work and childcare?

- Children and adults with symptoms should not attend child care, school or work until after the fourth day of the rash.
- Persons who are not vaccinated may have to remain home until concern for transmission is over.
- People who work in health care should have documented immunity to measles either through vaccination or laboratory testing.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider, local health center or contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention at www.mainepublichealth.gov or at 1-800-821-5821. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website www.cdc.gov is another excellent source of health information.