Measles Information Sheet

What is Measles?

Measles is a highly contagious, vaccine preventable disease caused by a virus. Measles is rare in the United States, because most people are vaccinated and protected from the disease. However, measles infections are still common in many other parts of the world, and the disease can be brought here by unvaccinated people who get exposed in other countries. Measles spreads easily to people who are not vaccinated, and the illness may cause serious complications such as pneumonia or brain swelling, and can even cause death.

How can you catch Measles?

Measles is spread through the air and by coughing, sneezing, and contact with mucus or saliva from the nose, mouth, or throat of an infected person. The virus can survive in the air for hours and infect unvaccinated persons even after the infected person left the room. A person with measles is contagious from 4 days before to 4 days after rash appears.

What are the symptoms of Measles?

The usual symptoms of measles are:

- High fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Red, blotchy rash that starts 2-4 days after the fever and lasts 5-6 days – the rash begins on face and spreads down the body then fades in the same order

How can you be treated for Measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Your doctor may recommend medicine to reduce fever, bed rest, fluids, and sometimes Vitamin A supplements.

How can you prevent Measles?

Measles can be prevented with the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine. Two doses of vaccine are nearly 100% effective in preventing measles illness.
Before any international travel:

- Infants 6-11 months old should receive one dose of the MMR vaccine
- Children 12 months of age and older should receive two doses of the MMR vaccine at least 28 days apart
- Adolescents and adults who have not had measles should get two doses of the MMR vaccine at least 28 days apart

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