

Measles contact information

Information for contacts of a measles case

What is Measles?

Measles is a highly infectious viral illness. People generally develop symptoms of measles 7 to 18 days following exposure to an infectious person.

The first symptoms of infection with measles are fever ($\geq 38^{\circ}\text{C}$), cough, runny nose, sore red eyes and tiredness. A blotchy red rash appears about three to four days later (with fever present), starting on the face before spreading to the body. The rash generally lasts four to seven days. People with measles can become very unwell and often require hospitalisations.

How is measles spread?

Measles is usually spread through breathing in droplets of virus that have been coughed or sneezed into the air by an infectious person. It can also be spread through direct contact with secretions from the nose or throat of an infectious person. Measles is easily spread, and the virus can persist in the environment for a few hours. Just being in the same room as an infectious person can lead to transmission of the virus.

How long does a person remain infectious?

People with measles are infectious from just before symptoms begin until four days after the start of the rash. The time from exposure to becoming sick is usually about 10 days, but can range from 7 to 18 days. The rash usually appears 14 days after exposure. It is therefore important to remember that people are infectious even before the rash has appeared.

Am I susceptible to measles?

If you have documented evidence of measles in the past or a record of vaccination against measles, you are considered immune.

People who are susceptible to contracting measles are:

- Children <6 months, if the mother is not immune to measles (never vaccinated or infected)
- Children 6-12 months of age (who did not have a measles vaccine)
- Any children with no documented evidence of having received a measles vaccine
- Adults born during or after 1966 with no documented evidence of having received a measles vaccine
- People who are immunocompromised (e.g. those with cancer, on chemotherapy or high-dose steroids)

What if I am unsure of my vaccination status?

If you are unsure whether you were vaccinated you can contact your GP or local council to determine if they have a record (if you were vaccinated by them). In addition, if you were born after 1996 in Australia, your vaccination record is held in the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR), regardless of where you were vaccinated.

What can I do to avoid measles?

If you have been in contact with someone with confirmed measles and you are susceptible to measles you may be able to reduce the risk of becoming infected. The time since your contact will determine the appropriate action. If you think you may be susceptible to measles you need to discuss your options with your local doctor as soon as possible. Below are the possible actions:

Within 3 days (or 72 hours) of first contact

You can get a vaccine (except if you are pregnant, immunocompromised or allergic to the vaccine).

Between 3 and 6 days (73 to 144 hours) of first contact

You can receive immunoglobulin. Please be aware that this may not completely prevent you from developing measles but may reduce the likelihood of illness or reduce the severity of illness if you do develop it.

Six or more days after first contact

The time to receive appropriate protection has elapsed and if you think you may be susceptible to measles you need to discuss this with your local doctor as soon as possible. You should monitor yourself for signs and symptoms of measles (as described above) for 18 days after your contact with the case as it can take up to 18 days to develop symptoms.

It is important to avoid contact with anyone who is susceptible to measles (e.g. babies less than 12 months of age or immunocompromised people). We recommend avoiding all public spaces such as shopping centres, public transport etc. during this time.

What do I do if I think I have measles?

If you develop symptoms of measles, make an appointment with your local doctor. Inform the practice when booking that you have been exposed to a case of measles and now have symptoms of measles and need to be isolated on arrival or ask for a home visit if possible. If this is not possible, try to get the last appointment of the day to avoid coming into contact with other patients in the waiting room. If you are very unwell you may need to go to a hospital. Please also inform the Emergency Department prior to your arrival that you should be isolated on arrival. Please take this information sheet with you to your appointment. You can also call the department for advice. The department can also arrange testing at your home if required.

What tests will my doctor do?

The most common testing is taking a blood sample to check for antibodies and a nose and throat swab to check for the presence of the measles virus.

If I am pregnant, what should I do?

Please contact your GP or obstetrician and determine if you are susceptible to measles. Pregnant women who become infected with measles can be at risk of more severe illness, potential miscarriage, early delivery or stillbirth. Measles virus is not known to cause birth defects in babies. Susceptible pregnant women who are contacts of a case of measles can still receive immunoglobulin (up to 6 days after first contact) to help protect them from becoming unwell. Your doctor will discuss this with you.

Further information

For further information contact your local doctor, or call the Department of Health on **1300 651 160**.