

What is Measles?

Measles is a respiratory disease caused by a virus. The disease of measles and the virus that causes it share the same name. The disease is also called rubeola. Measles virus normally grows in the cells that line the back of the throat and lungs.

What are the Signs and Symptoms of Measles?

The symptoms of measles generally begin about 7-14 days after a person is infected, and include:

- Blotchy rash
- Fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Feeling run down, achy (malaise)
- Tiny white spots with bluish-white centers found inside the mouth (Koplik's spots)

A typical case of measles begins with mild to moderate fever, cough, runny nose, red eyes, and sore throat. Two or three days after symptoms begin, tiny white spots (Koplik's spots) may appear inside the mouth.

Three to five days after the start of symptoms, a red or reddish-brown rash appears. 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. After a few days, the fever subsides and the rash fades.

How Can You Contract Measles?

Measles is highly contagious and can be spread to others from four days before to four days after the rash appears. Measles is so contagious that if one person has it, 90% of the people close to that person who are not immune will also become infected with the measles virus.

The virus lives in the mucus in the nose and throat of the infected person. When that person sneezes or coughs, droplets spray into the air. The droplets can get into other people's noses or throats when they breathe or put their fingers in their mouth or nose after touching an infected surface. The virus can live on infected surfaces for up to 2 hours and spreads so easily that people who are not immune will probably get it when they come close to someone who is infected.

Measles is a disease of humans; measles virus is not spread by any other animal species.

If you have any questions, please contact Allen County Public Health at 419-228-4457. Health Department staff members are available to answer your questions Monday to Friday from 8:00a.m. to 4:30 p.m. You can also visit www.allencountypublichealth.org and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Web site at www.bt.cdc.gov for additional information.

Is there a Vaccination for Measles?

Measles can be prevented by the combination MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine. In the decade before the measles vaccination program began, an estimated 3–4 million people in the United States were infected each year, of whom 400–500 died, 48,000 were hospitalized, and another 1,000 developed chronic disability from measles encephalitis. Widespread use of measles vaccine has led to a greater than 99% reduction in measles cases in the United States compared with the pre-vaccine era, and in 2012, only 55 cases of measles were reported in the United States.

However, measles is still common in other countries. The virus is highly contagious and can spread rapidly in areas where vaccination is not widespread. It is estimated that in 2008 there were 164,000 measles deaths worldwide—that equals about 450 deaths every day or about 18.