

FACTS ABOUT MEASLES

TRANSMISSION

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus that lives in the nose and throat mucus of an infected person. It can spread to others through coughing and sneezing.

Although the measles virus is rapidly inactivated by heat and sunlight, it can also live for up to two hours in an airspace where the infected person coughed or sneezed. If other people breathe the contaminated air or touch the infected surface, then touch their eyes, noses, or mouths, they can become infected.

Infected people can spread measles to others from four days before through four days after the rash appears, thus it is very important that infected people remain secluded for up to 4-5 days after the rash appears.

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

SYMPTOMS

The symptoms of measles generally appear about seven to 14 days after a person is infected.

Measles typically begins with

- high fever,
- cough,
- runny nose (coryza), and
- red, watery eyes

Two or three days after symptoms begin, tiny white spots (Koplik spots) may appear inside the mouth. The rash will then spread to the rest of the body, usually beginning as flat red spots that appear on the face at the hairline and spread downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs, and feet. Small raised bumps may also appear on top of the flat red spots. The spots may become joined together as they spread from the head to the rest of the body. When the rash appears, a person may also experience a high fever.

TREATMENT

There are no medications or specific treatment that kills the measles virus once someone is infected and develops the disease. Most people with measles get better by themselves. They should rest, drink plenty of fluids, and can take acetaminophen (Tylenol) to help reduce the fever and feel more comfortable.

During the infectious period, it is important to stay indoors, secluded from others.

People who are severely ill should discuss treatment with their doctor, otherwise follow these suggestions:

- **Take it easy.** Get rest and avoid busy activities.
- **Stay hydrated.** Drink plenty of water, fruit juice and herbal tea to replace fluids lost by fever and sweating.
- **Seek respiratory relief.** Use a humidifier to relieve a cough and sore throat.
- **Rest your eyes.** If you find bright light bothersome, as do many people with measles, keep the lights low or wear sunglasses. Also avoid reading or watching television if light from a reading lamp or from the television is bothersome.

PREVENTION

There is a highly effective vaccine that protects against measles. The vaccine is given as part of a combination vaccine, called the MMR vaccine that protects against other childhood diseases, measles, mumps, and rubella.

If you have been in close contact with someone who has measles, take these precautions to protect yourself and vulnerable family and friends:

- **Isolation.** Because measles is highly contagious from about four days before to four days after the rash breaks out, people with measles shouldn't return to activities in which they interact with other people during this period.

It is especially important to keep nonimmunized people away from the infected person.

- **Vaccinate.** Vaccination is the best approach towards preventing the disease. The MMR vaccine is very safe and highly effective with few side effects. College and university students, healthcare personnel, and international travelers are at increased risk for measles, and should receive two doses of the MMR vaccine to ensure adequate protection.

Do not hesitate to contact the Student Health Service at 412-383-1800 with any questions you may have. The SHS also administers MMR vaccine.