

Measles

What You Need to Know About Measles

Measles have been reported in Alaska so make sure your family is up to date with the MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine!

Measles can be serious. Common symptoms include a runny nose, red watery eyes, fever and cough, followed by a red blotchy rash that starts on the head and spreads down the body to the arms and legs. While measles typically clears up in about 4-6 days, it can cause serious health complications, especially in young children.

- About 1 in 4 people in the U.S. who get measles will be hospitalized.
- 1 out of every 1,000 people with measles will develop brain swelling, which could lead to brain damage.
- 1 or 2 out of 1,000 people with measles will die, even with the best care.



If you think someone in your family might have measles, call your health care provider or your local public health center immediately. Make sure you call and don't go directly to your doctor's office, clinic or school. Health care providers may have instructions to prevent exposing others to an infectious disease. Measles is a reportable health condition in Alaska. Health care providers are required to report suspected measles cases immediately to the Alaska Section of Epidemiology.

Measles is very contagious. Measles spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is so contagious that if one person has it, 9 out of 10 people around him or her will also become infected if they are not vaccinated or immune. The measles virus can remain airborne in a room after an infected person coughs or sneezes for up to 2 hours. An infected person can spread measles to others in the 4 days before they develop the measles rash through 4 days after rash onset.



Measles cases are on the rise in the United States and worldwide. Measles was declared eliminated from the U.S. in 2000 thanks to a highly effective vaccination program. However, measles is still common in many parts of the world, including some countries in Europe, Asia, the Pacific, and Africa. Worldwide, an estimated 20 million people get measles and 146,000 people, mostly children, die from the disease each year. Measles is frequently brought into the United States primarily by unvaccinated travelers who get measles while they are in other countries. This is how measles outbreaks typically get started in the United States. So, even if your family does not travel, you could still come into contact with measles. Everyone who is not protected against measles is at risk.

You have the power to protect your child and your family against measles with a safe and effective vaccine. The best protection against measles is the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. MMR vaccine provides safe and long-lasting protection against all strains of measles. Your child needs two doses of MMR vaccine for best protection:

- The first dose at 12 through 15 months of age
- The second dose 4 through 6 years of age

Most adults are likely protected (immunized as children or born before 1957 and exposed to measles), but if you don't know for certain that you have had at least one dose of MMR vaccine or do not have evidence of immunity, you should get vaccinated promptly. Because the measles vaccine is long-lasting and effective, booster shots are not needed. However, there may be some special situations where revaccination is needed. Visit this CDC webpage to learn more: Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) Vaccination: What Everyone Should Know. www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/mmr/public/index.html

If you have a religious vaccine exemption for your children, please consider vaccinating at least for measles. This will help protect those in your community with a compromised immune system (e.g., children going through chemotherapy) who would be at risk of serious complications if exposed.

Take special precautions if you are traveling to an area where measles cases have been identified. BEFORE you travel, talk to your health care provider or a public health nurse and confirm your family's immunizations are up to date. AFTER you travel, call your health care provider if you or anyone you have traveled with gets a rash and fever within 3 weeks of returning from your trip.

For more information:

CDC: Measles Information, www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html

DHSS: School and Child Care Immunization Requirements, dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/iz/Pages/school.aspx

DHSS: Measles Information measles.dhss.alaska.gov