

Measles

Frequently Asked Questions



What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious disease that is caused by a virus. It is a respiratory disease, and in rare cases it can cause serious complications. The last nationwide measles epidemic occurred from 1989 through 1991 when over 55,000 measles cases and roughly 135 deaths were reported in the United States, with over 1,700 cases and 9 deaths in Philadelphia.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of measles can include:

- High fever
- Cough, runny nose
- Red, watery eyes
- Red bumpy rash
- White spots in the mouth
- Diarrhea

How does it spread?

The virus lives in droplets from the nose or throat of a person with measles, or on objects contaminated with those droplets. The measles virus can also be spread when an infected person sneezes or coughs. People become infected when the droplets are breathed in or land on their nose or mouth.

Who is at risk of developing measles?

The people most at risk of getting measles are:

- Children less than 15 months of age, who are too young to receive the vaccine
- People who are not vaccinated
- Children vaccinated before the age of one

How is measles diagnosed and treated?

Measles is diagnosed by a doctor and must be confirmed by laboratory testing. There is no treatment for measles.

What should I do if I think I have it?

If you think you have measles, or have been exposed to a person with measles you should contact your doctor immediately. It is recommended that you call the doctor before coming in for your appointment. The doctor may ask you to wear a mask to prevent spreading the illness to other patients in the office.

How is it prevented?

- The measles vaccine prevents measles.
- Two doses of vaccine are currently recommended for all children.
- If you have measles you should avoid public settings such as school, work or daycare settings for 4 days after the rash appears.

For more information contact your doctor, refer to <http://www.phila.gov/Health/> or contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740.

