

What is measles?

Measles is a highly infectious illness caused by a virus. The virus is passed by sneezing and coughing. You can catch the virus in two ways:

- by breathing in the virus.
- touching a surface where the virus has settled and then placing your hands near your nose or mouth. The measles virus can survive on surfaces for a few hours.

What is the incubation period?

The incubation period (the period when someone has the infection but is not displaying symptoms) is on average ten days.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include:

- fever
- irritability
- cold-like symptoms
- eyes may be sensitive to light
- dry, harsh cough
- white spots on the gums (normally day 2 and 3)
- rash (day 3 or 4) starting on the face and behind the ears, then spreading down the body
- diarrhoea - often in the early stages in children

Serious complications of measles can occur such as:

- ear infections (approx. 1 in 8)
- bronchitis/pneumonia (approx. 1 in 25)
- convulsions/fits (approx. 1 in 200)
- meningitis (approx. 1 in 1000)
- in rare cases, encephalitis (infection of the brain)

Editorial Board: 1189/15

Review Date: March 2017

Complications are generally more common in young babies, older children and adults.

Who can catch measles?

Anyone who has not had measles and developed natural immunity, or has not been vaccinated against measles. Children are the most vulnerable, but babies up to 6 months old are generally protected by their mothers' antibodies.

What is the treatment whilst in hospital?

There is no specific treatment for measles, but an appropriate medicine such as Paracetamol should be used to help bring down a high temperature. **Aspirin should not be used in children under 16 years of age.**

If a secondary infection develops, such as an ear or chest infection the doctor may prescribe antibiotics to treat this.

As soon as possible after the onset of the illness, a mouth swab will be taken to confirm a definite case of measles. Your GP will be informed of a positive result. While you are in hospital you will be nursed in a single room and staff will wear aprons, gloves and masks when looking after you.

Do I need to stay off school or work?

Yes. Measles is infectious from just before the symptoms first occur and for approximately four days after the appearance of the rash.

General advice is to stay off school or work for **at least four days after the rash appears.**

How do I prevent getting measles?

- Those at risk should avoid close contact with a person with measles.
- By immunisation. There is a safe and effective vaccine, which protects against measles. It is one of the “M” components in the MMR vaccine. A child needs **two doses of this vaccine**, one at 13 -15 months and another dose pre-school. If a child or young adult has **not** received two doses of the MMR vaccine, these can be given at any age.

The MMR vaccine is a ‘live’ vaccine and therefore it is not recommended for children with a weakened immune system (e.g. due to medication or chemotherapy). These children are particularly vulnerable and should avoid contact with anyone with measles. Seek advice from your consultant or GP.

If you are pregnant and you have been in contact with measles, always seek advice from your GP or midwife immediately.

For more information about measles contact:

Infection Prevention Team
University Hospital of South Manchester
Neil Cliffe Building
Wythenshawe Hospital
Southmoor Road
Wythenshawe
M23 9LT
Tel: 0161 291 2630

Further information can also be found at:

www.hpa.org.uk/topics

Editorial Board: 1189/15

Review Date: March 2017

Measles

Information for patients