



COUNTY OF ORANGE HEALTH CARE AGENCY

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Measles Frequently Asked Questions

modified from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website
<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/>, last accessed 5/2/2019

What is measles?

Measles is a very contagious acute infection caused by the measles virus. It begins with fever, cough, runny nose, and conjunctivitis (red eyes). A red rash occurs a few days later that starts on the face and upper neck, then spreads down to the rest of the body.



Photo Source: CDC: <https://phil.cdc.gov/Details.aspx?pid=17980>

Is measles serious?

Although most people recover from measles, approximately 20% of cases experience one or more complications. These complications are more common among children under 5 years of age and adults over 20 years. Ear infections (otitis media) occur in nearly one out of 10 children with measles. Diarrhea can also occur. Measles can also cause pneumonia and less commonly encephalitis (swelling of the brain), hearing loss, seizures and death. Before measles vaccination, about 3 to 4 million people got measles each year in the United States, of whom 400 to 500 died, 48,000 were hospitalized, and 4,000 developed encephalitis from measles.

How common is measles infection?

Worldwide, there are approximately 19 cases of measles per 1 million persons reported each year, with 89,780 deaths. Although ongoing transmission of measles in the United States has been eliminated since 2000, cases still occur here every year associated with travelers from affected areas, such as Israel, England, France, Germany, India, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Between 37 and 667 cases of measles have generally been reported each year in the U.S., although 2019 numbers have surpassed this already. In Orange County, there are generally 0-3 measles cases reported each year, associated with travel to an affected area. Outbreaks occurred in Orange County in 2014 (22 cases) and 2015 (35 cases), with the latter being part of a multi-state outbreak associated with Disneyland.

How is measles spread?

Measles is spread through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can spread very easily and quickly among people who not protected by vaccine or previous infection. Infected people are most contagious from about 4 days before their rash starts until 4 days afterwards.

What should I do if I have been exposed to someone with measles? How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Review your vaccination history if you have not previously had measles. If you have been vaccinated, you are very unlikely to develop illness after exposure. Your healthcare provider can help determine if you are protected from measles based on your records and/or laboratory tests. Initial symptoms most commonly appear 8-12 days, but up to 21 days, after exposure to an infected persons, with rash appearing a few days later. **If you have been exposed to measles and develop fever, runny nose, cough, red eyes, or rash, stay home and call your healthcare provider to discuss your symptoms. If you need medical attention, inform your health care provider of your possible measles exposure and symptoms over the phone so appropriate precautions can be taken when you are seen.**

How is measles diagnosed?

Measles is diagnosed by laboratory testing of throat or respiratory specimens and urine; blood may also be requested. Orange County Public Health can assist with the testing at your healthcare provider's request. **Before seeing your healthcare provider, call ahead and let them know you may have measles so appropriate measures are taken in the office to prevent infection of others.**

How is measles treated?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Vitamin A treatment is recommended for children with acute measles.

How do I know if I am protected (immune) against measles?

You are considered protected against measles if you have written records showing at least **ONE** of the following:

- Two doses of measles-containing vaccine if you are a school-aged child (K-12) or an adult in a *high risk setting for measles transmission
- One dose of measles-containing vaccine if you are a pre-school aged child or an adult who will NOT be in a *high risk setting for measles transmission

***High risk settings/groups include:**

- Students at post-high school educational institutions
- Healthcare personnel
- International travelers
- Laboratory test confirmation of measles infection at some point in your life
- Laboratory test confirmation of immunity to measles
- Birth before 1957 (*additional evidence of immunity may be needed in some situations*).

How can measles be prevented?

There is a safe and effective vaccine (MMR; measles, mumps, rubella) available to prevent measles. MMR is part of the routine vaccination schedule for children, with the first dose starting at 12-15 months of age. Specific recommendations are available at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/measles/default.htm>. For pre-travel recommendations, see <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/travelers.html>.