



Clatsop County

Public Health

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Measles - Frequently Asked Questions

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious and potentially serious illness caused by a virus. Measles is spread through the air after a person with measles coughs or sneezes. The virus can linger in the air for up to two hours after someone who is infectious has left.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles symptoms begin with a high fever, cough, runny nose and red eyes, followed by a rash that usually begins at the head and spreads to the rest of the body. A person can spread the virus before they show symptoms. People are contagious with measles for up to four days before and up to four days after the rash appears.

After someone is exposed to measles, illness develops in about one to three weeks.

How contagious is measles?

Measles is extremely contagious. The virus travels through the air and can stay up to two hours in the air of a room where a person with measles has been. If other people breathe the contaminated air or touch a contaminated surface, then touch their eyes, noses or mouths, they can become infected. Measles is so contagious that if one person has it, 90 percent of the people close to that person who are not immune will also become infected.

What should I do if I think I have the measles?

Anyone who has been exposed and believes they have symptoms of measles should call their health care provider **before** visiting the medical office. This will enable the clinic to develop a plan for providing care without exposing others at the clinic.

How serious is measles?

Measles can be serious in all age groups. However, children younger than 5 years and adults older than 20 years are more likely to suffer from measles complications. Common complications of measles include ear infection, pneumonia and diarrhea. As many as one out of every 20 children with measles gets pneumonia, the most common cause of death from measles in young children. About one child out of every 1,000 who get measles will develop encephalitis (swelling of the brain) that can lead to convulsions and can leave the child deaf or with intellectual disability. Measles may cause pregnant women to give birth prematurely or to have a low-birth-weight baby.

In 2017, there were 110,000 measles deaths worldwide, mostly among children younger than 5, according to the World Health Organization.

How is measles treated?

There is no specific treatment for measles.

How can I prevent measles?

Immunization is the best prevention for measles. The measles vaccine is very effective. One dose of the measles vaccine is about 93 percent effective at preventing measles. Two doses are about 97 percent effective, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

How many doses of the measles vaccine do I need?

Children should receive two doses of the MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine, with the first dose given at age 12 to 15 months and a second dose at age 4 to 6 years.

Adults born after 1956 should get at least one dose of MMR vaccine, unless they have other evidence of immunity (see below). Health care personnel, college students and international travelers without other evidence of immunity should receive two appropriately spaced doses of MMR vaccine.

Immunization doses may be different for international travelers. Talk to your health care provider for immunization recommendations.

Persons are considered immune (not susceptible) to measles if any of the following apply:

- They were born before 1957.
- They are certain they have had measles.
- They are up to date on measles vaccines (one dose for children 12 months through 3 years old, two doses for anyone 4 years and older).

Oregon Immunization database, Alert IIS has immunization information available for Oregon residents whose providers report to this system. If you are uncertain about your vaccine status contact your healthcare provider, your local pharmacist or Clatsop Co. Dept. of Public Health at 503-325-8500 who can perform a query.

How common is measles?

While measles is rare in the United States, it is still commonly transmitted elsewhere in the world. In 2018, there were 349 confirmed cases of measles in people from 26 states and the District of Columbia, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Measles immunization resulted in an 80 percent decrease in measles deaths worldwide between 2000 and 2017 (from 545,000 deaths in 2000 to 110,000 deaths in 2017), according to the World Health Organization (WHO). During that timeframe, measles immunization prevented an estimated 21.1 million deaths, according to WHO.

Before the measles vaccination program began in the U.S. in 1963, about 3 to 4 million people in the U.S. got measles every year. Of those, 400 to 500 people died and 48,000 were hospitalized, according to the CDC.

Where can I go to receive a measles vaccination?

Call your local provider, pharmacist or Clatsop Co. Dept. of Public Health at (503) 325-8500 for an appointment