

FACT SHEET – Measles

What is Measles?

Measles is an infection caused by a virus (germ) and can cause:

- Fever
- Irritability
- Cold/Catarrhal symptoms – running nose
- Sore and runny eyes
- Dry 'croupy' cough
- White spots on the gums (2nd and 3rd day)
- Rash (4th Day) 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 infection can occur and secondary infections such as ear infections (approx 1 in 20), bronchitis/pneumonia (approx 1 in 25), convulsions (approx 1 in 200) and in rare cases, encephalitis (infection of the brain) or meningitis (approx 1 in 1000) may occur. The likelihood of problems varies with age and complications are generally more common in young babies, older children and adults.

Who does it affect?

ANYONE – who has not developed natural immunity or has not been vaccinated against measles. Children are most vulnerable though. Babies are usually protected by their mother's antibodies up to six months from birth.

Pregnant women exposed to measles should consult their GP for advice.

How do you get Measles?

Measles is very infectious and you catch it by being in close contact with someone who already has the infection. The virus is passed in the secretions of the infected person's nose and throat and is spread by their sneezing and coughing. Also it is possible to catch measles from direct contact with articles which have been contaminated by these infected secretions e.g. hankies.

How do you prevent Measles?

- By immunisation – there is a safe and effective vaccine which protects against measles. It is one of the components in MMR vaccine and a child needs a total of two doses of this vaccine, the first at 12 – 13 months and a second before starting school. Protection is lifelong.

Do you need to stay off School/Work?

Yes – Measles is very infectious. Measles is infectious from just before the symptoms occur and for approximately 4 days after the appearance of the rash, so general advice is to stay off school or work for **at least 4 days after the rash starts**

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