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MEASLES FAQ

What is measles?

Measles is a serious viral illness. It spreads easily through coughing and sneezing. In rare cases, it can be deadly. The measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine protects against measles, as well as mumps and rubella (German measles). Measles (including suspected cases) is a legally notifiable disease in the UK; this is where doctors notify the local health protection team of a case of measles.

What are the symptoms?

Measles starts with a fever. Soon after, it causes a cough, runny nose, and red eyes. About four days after symptoms start a rash of tiny, red or brown spots breaks out. It starts at the head and spreads to the rest of the body. The rash can last for a week, and coughing can last for 10 days. Some children who get measles also get diarrhoea or ear infections.

How do you catch measles?

Measles is caught through direct contact with an infected person or through the air via coughs or sneezes. You can catch measles from an infected person even before they have the measles rash. A person with measles is usually infectious to others from four days before to four days after the onset of the rash.

If you have not been immunised or have not had measles infection, you have a high chance of catching measles if you come into contact with a case. The virus is most infectious before the rash appears and only minor contact may be needed for the virus to spread.

What complications are possible from catching measles?

Complications are quite common and they include:

- eye infections (conjunctivitis)
- a severe cough and breathing difficulties (croup)
- ear infections
- viral and bacterial lung infections (pneumonia)
- inflammation/swelling of the brain (encephalitis).

Measles can kill – one to three out of every 5,000 children in the UK who get measles will die from the disease.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Patients should drink lots of clear fluid to replace water lost through the fever. Paracetamol/Ibuprofen can be used to reduce the fever. As measles is caused by a virus, antibiotics are ineffective, although they may be prescribed if a secondary bacterial infection develops.

Can adults catch measles?

If you were born before 1970 in the UK you are likely to have natural protection from having been exposed to measles as a child. The decision on whether to offer the MMR to adults needs to take into consideration the past vaccination history and the risk of exposure.

I have measles, how long should I be off work or school?

Measles is most infectious **from four days before the rash appears until four days afterwards. Formal exclusion is four days from onset of rash.**

What should I do if I think I or someone in my family has measles?

If measles is suspected contact your GP surgery and inform them you or your child has a rash illness before attending, so that arrangements can be made to minimise contact with other vulnerable patients.

Anyone with measles should be closely monitored for complications. Hospital treatment may be required if serious complications develop.

How do I avoid catching measles?

Measles can be prevented by getting the safe and highly effective measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. Two doses of the MMR vaccine are required.

Individuals born before 1970 are likely to have had all three natural infections and are less likely to be susceptible to infection.

I'm pregnant – can I get the MMR jab?

Pregnant women and people with weak immune systems should **not be immunised** but may be treated with immunoglobulin – a special protein injection which can provide immediate short-term protection by attacking the virus.

If you are unsure of your MMR vaccination history and are a contact of a case, you need to contact your health care provider, GP or midwife.

If you are planning pregnancy please discuss with your GP for preconception advice.

Is the MMR vaccine safe?

Yes, the MMR vaccine is recommended by the World Health Organisation, UK Department of Health and Public Health Wales.

What should I do if I develop symptoms?

If you feel unwell, have a sudden high temperature raised to 38°C or above and any of the other symptoms as above go home, stay there, take simple measures to ease your symptoms and notify your GP.

How do I get further information?

Information on MMR vaccination is available at:

<http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/doityourself/vaccinations/MMR?locale=en>
www.wales.nhs.uk/immunisation

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Measles/pages/Introduction.aspx>
<https://patient.info/doctor/measles-mumps-and-rubella-mmr-vaccination>