

Measles in 2024: What you need to know

The U.S. is currently experiencing measles outbreaks in some states across the country. In almost every instance, measles cases are linked to unvaccinated or undervaccinated individuals.

Why? The pandemic caused many children to miss out on routine vaccinations, including the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine. This drop in childhood vaccination coverage coincided with [declining confidence](#) in vaccine safety and growing resistance to vaccine requirements. Skepticism about COVID-19 vaccines has resulted in some people questioning or opposing other routine immunizations. For example, false claims that “measles isn’t serious” and that “vaccines are unnecessary” echo false narratives about COVID-19.

Below are common questions and answers about measles that you can share with your community.

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious and potentially life-threatening disease caused by a virus. It starts with a fever followed by a cough, runny nose, and red eyes; and then produces a rash of tiny, red spots. Measles can affect anyone, but is most serious for children under 5, immunocompromised people, and pregnant people, who may give birth prematurely or whose babies may have low-birth-weight as a result of a measles infection.

Why is measles so dangerous?

Measles isn’t just a rash, it can cause serious health problems and even death. About 1 in 5 people in the U.S. who get measles will be hospitalized with pneumonia, dehydration, or brain swelling. If you get measles, it can also damage your immune system, making you more vulnerable to other diseases.

How contagious is measles?

Measles spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It’s so contagious that unvaccinated people have a 90% chance of becoming infected if exposed. An infected person can spread measles to others before they have symptoms.

How do I protect my family?

Getting an MMR vaccine is the best way to prevent getting sick with measles or spreading it to other people. Children are routinely vaccinated for measles at 12 to 15 months, and again at 4 to 6 years of age, before starting kindergarten. The measles vaccine is safe and very protective. One dose of the MMR vaccine provides 93% protection and two doses provide 97% protection against all strains of measles. Because some children are too young to be immunized, it’s important that those around them are vaccinated to protect them.

What do I do if there is a measles outbreak in my community?

Anyone who is not fully vaccinated for measles should be immunized with a measles vaccine as soon as possible after exposure. Measles vaccines given within 72 hours after exposure may prevent or reduce the severity of disease. Children as young as 6 months old can receive the measles vaccine if they are at risk during an outbreak, so if your child isn’t fully vaccinated with two doses of MMR, talk to your pediatrician.

Parents should talk to their child’s doctor now to make sure they are up to date with all vaccinations. Unvaccinated kids who have been exposed to the virus should stay home from school, daycare, and other activities for 21 days.