



Tarrant County Public Health

A healthier community through leadership in health strategy

The Facts About Measles

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious infectious viral disease that resides in the mucus in the nose and throat of infected people. The virus may stay suspended in the air or on a surface for up to two hours after an infectious person has been present. Symptoms can begin usually seven to 21 days after a person is infected.

Who is most at risk for measles?

Anyone born in or after 1957, who has not had measles, or has not been vaccinated.

How is measles spread?

Measles is spread when an infected person near you sneezes or coughs and you breathe in the droplets. If one person has it, 90 percent of the people close to that person who are not immune will also become infected. Infected people are contagious from about four days before their rash starts to four days afterwards. Measles is a human disease. It is not spread by animals.

What are the symptoms of measles?

A typical case of measles begins with a mild to moderate fever, cough, runny nose, red eyes and sore throat. One to three days after symptoms start, a red or reddish-brown rash appears. The rash usually begins on a person's face at the hairline and spreads downward and outward to the hands and feet. When the rash appears, a person's fever may spike to more than 104 degrees. After a few days, the fever subsides and the rash fades.

How do I keep from getting measles?

Besides avoiding people with measles, the Measles/Mumps/Rubella (MMR) or the Measles/Mumps/Rubella/Varicella (MMRV) vaccines are the best protection against measles. These vaccines are strongly endorsed by medical and public health experts as safe and effective and are recommended for children before entering school. Anyone born in or after 1957 who has not had measles or been vaccinated is at risk and should get the MMR vaccine.

How serious is the disease?

It can infect anyone who is not protected. Measles is unpleasant and the complications are dangerous. Six to 20 percent of the people who get the disease will get an ear infection, diarrhea or even pneumonia. One out of 1,000 people with measles develop inflammation of the brain, and about one out of 1,000 will die. Widespread use of the measles vaccine has led to a greater than 99 percent reduction in measles compared to the decade before the measles vaccination program began, when an estimated 3–4 million people in the United States were infected each year, four to five hundred died, 48,000 were hospitalized and another 1,000 developed chronic disability from measles encephalitis. However, measles is still very common—even epidemic—in some parts of the world. Visitors to our country and unvaccinated U.S. travelers returning from other countries can unknowingly bring measles into the United States. Since the virus is highly contagious, imported cases can quickly spread, causing outbreaks or epidemics among unvaccinated people and under-vaccinated communities. To protect your children, yourself and your community, it is important to be vaccinated against measles.

For more information, call 817-321-4700,
or visit <http://health.tarrantcounty.com>

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