

# Measles Vaccine: Patient FAQs



## **1. Who should be vaccinated against measles?**

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The measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine is recommended for infants. The first dose is given to infants aged 12-15 months, followed by a second dose between age 4-6 years. Catch-up doses can be given to children who did not receive MMR vaccine doses at these ages. Adults who do not have evidence of immunity should also receive the vaccine, as long as they are not immunocompromised or pregnant.

## **2. Who should not be vaccinated against measles?**

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The only people who should not get measles vaccine are those who are immunocompromised or pregnant, or those who have had an allergic reaction to previous vaccine (this is rare and occurs ~1 in a million).

## **3. Is the measles vaccine safe?**

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Yes. The measles vaccine is safe. Occasional and rare side effects of the MMR vaccine include rash, fever, tenderness at the injection site, temporary inflammation of joints, or a temporary decrease in blood platelets. In contrast, common complications from natural infection with measles include ear infections (1 out of 10 children) and diarrhea (less than 1 out of 10 children). Some people may even suffer from severe complications, such as pneumonia (1 out of every 20 children) and encephalitis (1 child out of every 1,000). Natural infection with measles may even lead to hospitalization (1 in 5 unvaccinated people) or death (1 to 3 of every 1,000 children).

## **4. How long does it take for the measles vaccine to work in your body?**

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For the measles vaccine to work, the body needs time to produce protective antibodies in response to the vaccine. Detectable antibodies generally appear within just a few days after vaccination. People are usually fully protected after about 2 or 3 weeks. If you're traveling internationally, make sure to get up to date on all your measles shots. You should plan to be fully vaccinated at least 2 weeks before you depart. If your trip is less than 2 weeks away and you're not protected against measles, you should still get a dose of measles vaccine.

## **5. How effective is the MMR vaccine in preventing measles?**

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Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent measles. A dose of measles vaccine administered after 12 months of age results in immunity in 93% of people. The second dose increases immunity to 97%.

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## 6. Can I take Vitamin A to prevent measles?

Vitamin A does not prevent measles; only the MMR vaccine prevents measles. Vitamin A should not be used to try to prevent measles, nor should it be used in high dosages because it can be toxic. For example, it can cause nausea, vomiting, headache, fatigue, joint and bone pain, blurry vision, skin/ hair problems, increased intracranial pressure, liver damage, confusion, and coma.

Vitamin A is recommended for those infected with measles, regardless of hospitalization status. It is recommended for administration once daily for 2 days (i.e., immediately on diagnosis and repeated the next day), at the following doses:

- 200 000 IU (60 000 µg retinol activity equivalent [RAE]) for children 12 months or older;
- 100 000 IU (30 000 µg RAE) for infants 6 through 11 months of age; and
- 50 000 IU (15 000 µg RAE) for infants younger than 6 months.
- An additional (i.e., a third) age-specific dose of vitamin A should be given 2 through 6 weeks later to children with clinical signs and symptoms of vitamin A deficiency.

Additional information can be found in the [Measles Chapter](#) of Red Book Online.

## 7. I've been exposed to someone who has measles. What should I do?

Immediately call your health care provider and let them know about your symptoms so that they can tell you what to do next. Your health care provider can make special arrangements to evaluate you, if needed, without putting other patients and medical office staff at risk.

## 8. My health care provider or someone from the health department told me that I have measles. What should I do?

If you have measles, you should stay home for four days after you develop the rash. Staying home is an important way to not spread measles to other people. Ask your health care provider when it is safe to be around other people again. You should also:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and put your used tissue in the trash can. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, not your hands.
- [Wash your hands](#) often with soap and water.
- Avoid sharing drinks or eating utensils.
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces, such as toys, doorknobs, tables, and counters. Standard household disinfectants will readily kill the measles virus.

Call your health care provider if you are concerned about your symptoms.