

Measles

An illness requiring airborne precautions

This handout describes measles (rubeola) and its symptoms. It also explains how it is spread and tells how to keep it from spreading to others.

What is measles?

Measles or rubeola (“hard measles”) is a disease that is caused by a virus. This virus grows in the cells that line the back of the throat and the lungs.

Measles spreads very easily from person to person. Anyone who is not immunized will likely get it.

Measles can cause other health problems. These include diarrhea, ear infections, pneumonia, *encephalitis* (swelling of the brain), seizures, and death.

If you have been exposed to measles, talk with your healthcare provider. All cases of the measles must be reported to the health department. This is done so that we can follow up with other people who may have come in contact with you. These people are at risk of becoming ill and may need care.

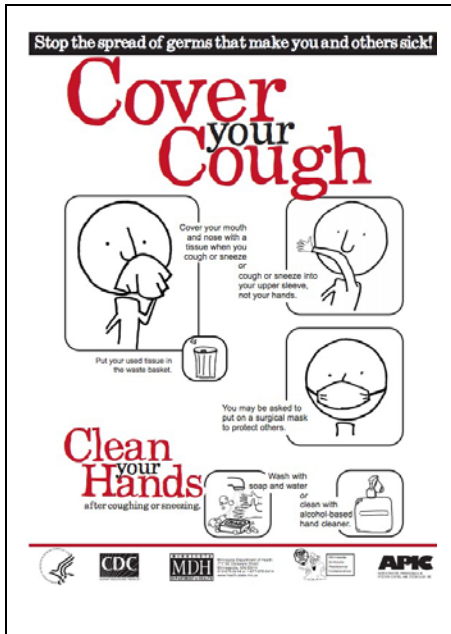
What are the symptoms?

Most times, symptoms appear about 10 to 12 days after someone is exposed to the virus. They include:

- High fever that lasts about 2 to 4 days.
- Cough, runny nose, and/or *conjunctivitis* (pink eye) after the fever.
- A reddish or brownish blotchy rash that appears about 14 days after exposure. The rash lasts 5 to 6 days. It begins at the hairline and then spreads over the face and upper neck. Over the next 3 days, the rash slowly moves downward and outward, reaching the hands and feet.



Measles can be spread when someone who has the disease sneezes or coughs.



How is measles spread?

When an infected person sneezes or coughs, droplets spray into the air. Other people can breathe in these droplets. A person can spread measles starting 4 days before the rash appears to 4 days after it appears.

Measles can also spread when someone puts their fingers in their mouth or nose after touching an infected surface. The virus stays active and contagious on surfaces for up to 2 hours.

People who have measles or are exposed to measles should:

- **Wear a mask**
- **Wash their hands often**
- **Place used tissues in wastebaskets when they come to the hospital or a clinic**

Pick up a free “Cover Your Cough” kit” at the Information Desk or clinic.

How is it diagnosed?

Measles is diagnosed by its symptoms. We can verify that you have the disease by taking a sample of your saliva or blood and testing it in the lab.

How are others protected from the measles?

At UW Medical Center, we place an “Airborne Precautions” sign near the door of your room. This sign tells healthcare staff and your visitors to observe these precautions when caring for you. If someone is at risk for getting the disease, we advise them not to enter your room.

If you are in airborne precautions:

- Hospital staff will wear masks, eye protection, gowns, and gloves when providing care.
- Visitors should **not** enter the room if they have never had measles or if they are not sure if they have had the disease. Visitors who are sure they have had all of their MMR (mumps, measles, rubella) vaccinations may enter the room. All visitors who enter the room should wear gowns, gloves, and masks.
- **We advise hand washing for 15 seconds, using alcohol hand gels, and environmental cleanliness.**
- We will ask you to stay in your room unless you need to go to other areas of the hospital for treatment. If you leave your room, we will ask you to wash your hands and wear a yellow gown, gloves, and a mask.
- Please do **not** use the nutrition rooms. When you want a snack or ice water, ask a member of your care team to bring it to you.

When can precautions be stopped?

Airborne precautions may be stopped 5 days after the rash appears.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Infection Prevention:
206.598.6122