



Measles

How to protect your child

Measles is a highly contagious illness caused by a virus. The virus spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It still causes much distress to children and their families in our community. Many people don't realise how serious the disease is.

What are the symptoms?

A child who catches measles is likely to get a fever, runny nose, sore eyes and rash. The child can become very ill, and may even have to go to hospital. Complications of measles such as middle ear infection and pneumonia are common.

Even more worrying is the possibility that measles infection might lead to encephalitis. This is an inflammation of the brain, which can leave permanent brain damage or kill the child.

Even after a child gets better, a rare but very serious condition called SSPE may occur years after the measles infection. This destroys the brain and always leads to death.

People with measles can be infectious to others even before the rash appears, sometimes even before the disease has been diagnosed. The good news is that a safe and effective vaccine is available to protect children against measles.

When should my child be vaccinated?

- At 12 months of age,
- and with a booster just before starting school.

The measles vaccine is usually given as



part of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. This contains very small amounts of each of the weakened viruses. In some special circumstances of higher risk, your doctor may advise you to immunise your child earlier than usual.

Will my child have a reaction to the vaccine?

Most children just get a small red lump at the injection site, which may be itchy. Other reactions are much less frequent than the problems that can happen with natural measles infection.

About a week after the vaccine, some children may develop a fever and sometimes also a rash. This can last two or three days, but they are not infectious to others. Serious reactions to the vaccine are rare.

What happens if my child is not vaccinated?

Children who are not immunised against measles are most likely to catch it at some time during their lives. This is because measles is so contagious. If there is an outbreak of measles in the community, an unimmunised child may be asked to stay home from school or preschool. This is for the protection of that child and other children.

Can my child be vaccinated during an outbreak of measles?

Yes. The vaccine can be used to protect unvaccinated children from the age of nine months during an outbreak of measles. But it must be given within three days of the children being exposed to the virus.

Measles is a serious disease that can and does damage young children. Immunisation is a safe and effective way of protecting your children against this disease. Don't wait until they catch measles. Visit your family doctor for more information on immunisation against measles, or contact your local Public Health Unit.



Illustrations taken from Understanding Childhood Immunisation, with permission from the Commonwealth Department of Human Service and Health

