



**McHenry County Department of Health  
Communicable Disease Program / Immunization Clinic**

## Measles FAQs

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### **What is measles?**

Measles is a serious respiratory infection that causes a rash and fever. It is very contagious. Measles can be dangerous, especially for babies and young children. For some children, measles can lead to pneumonia (a serious lung infection), lifelong brain damage or deafness. In rare cases, it can be deadly.

### **How is measles spread?**

Measles spreads when a person infected with the measles virus breathes, coughs, or sneezes. It is very contagious. You can catch measles just by being in a room where a person with measles has been, up to 2 hours after that person has left. And you can catch measles from an infected person even before they have a measles rash. Almost everyone who has not had the vaccine will get measles if they are exposed to the measles virus.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of Measles?**

- Fever
- Cough
- Nasal congestion
- Red eyes
- Rash

### **How can I protect myself and my child?**

The best way to protect against measles is to get the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine (called the MMR vaccine). Doctors recommend that all children get the first dose of the MMR vaccine at the age of 12 to 15 months and a second dose at 4 to 6 years of age. The MMR vaccine protects your child from measles, and also against mumps and rubella. 93-97% of people who have received the MMR vaccine and booster have life-long protection against the measles virus. Infants who are too young to be vaccinated should avoid contact with sick people or situations where they may be exposed to sick people. For those who travel internationally, all individuals older than 6 months should receive the MMR vaccine. Talk with your health care professional about protecting your baby at least 4 weeks prior to departure.

### **How common was measles in the United States before the vaccine?**

Before the measles vaccination program started in 1963, 3 to 4 million people got measles each year in the United States. Of those people, 400 to 500 died, 48,000 were hospitalized, and 4,000 developed encephalitis (brain swelling) from measles.

### **Is the MMR vaccine safe?**

Yes. The MMR vaccine is very safe, and it is effective at preventing measles (as well as mumps and rubella). Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. But most children who get the MMR vaccine have few side effects. Most commonly, people complain of fever, pain or redness at the site the vaccine was given.



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**Is there a link between the MMR vaccine and autism?**

No. Scientists in the United States and other countries have carefully studied the MMR vaccine. None has found a link between autism and the MMR vaccine.

**Is a baby with one vaccine dose protected?**

Protection is afforded after one measles vaccination (93%); however care should be taken to avoid exposing your baby to the virus.

**Am I protected against measles?**

You are considered protected from measles (lifetime immunity) if you have written documentation (records) showing at least **one** of the following:

- You received **two** doses of measles-containing vaccine, and you are a(n)—
  - school-aged child (grades K-12)
  - adult who will be in a setting that poses a high risk for measles transmission, including students at post-high school education institutions, healthcare personnel, and international travelers.
- You received **one** dose of measles-containing vaccine, and you are a(n)—
  - preschool-aged child
  - adult who will not be in a high-risk setting for measles transmission.
- A laboratory confirmation that you had the measles infection or vaccine at some point in your life.
- You were born before 1957 (Healthcare providers born before 1957 may be asked to prove immunity).

**I had measles as a child, can I get measles again?**

No, if you have had the measles infection in the past you cannot get the infection again. Many do not recall or their parents do not recall if they have had the disease, therefore, there is a chance that you do not have immunity to the measles virus and you could be susceptible. If you are concerned that this is the case, consult your medical provider.

**Could I still get measles if I am fully vaccinated?**

Very few people—about 3 out of 100—who have received the measles vaccine will still get measles if exposed to the virus. Experts aren't sure why; it could be that their immune systems didn't respond as well as they should have to the vaccine. It is important to note that fully vaccinated people who get measles are much more likely to have a milder illness, and they are also less likely to spread the disease to other people, including people who can't get vaccinated because they are too young or have weakened immune systems.

**What should I do if I'm unsure whether I'm immune to measles?**

If you're unsure whether you're immune to measles, you should first try to find your vaccination records or documentation of measles immunity. If you do not have written documentation of measles immunity, you should get vaccinated with measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. Another option is to have a doctor test your blood to determine whether you're immune. There is no harm in getting another dose of MMR vaccine if you may already be immune to measles (or mumps or rubella).



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**Will my health insurance cover the cost of the vaccine?**

Some health insurance will cover the cost of the vaccine. Your individual health insurance company will be better able to answer this question.

**Is MCDH going to hold adult measles vaccination clinics?**

MCDH currently does not offer adult measles vaccination to the public, however; MCDH Immunization Clinic is investigating options of offering adult vaccines in the future. Many area pharmacies and physician offices offer the measles vaccine. Illinois Pharmacists are only licensed to deliver vaccines to individuals  $\geq 14$  years of age.

**Can babies be immunized before they are twelve months old?**

This is only recommended if the baby has been exposed to the measles virus (under the advisement of the local health authority) or will be traveling to an area of the world with increased risk.

**Does breastfeeding protect babies from the measles?**

Breastfeeding may provide a small amount of passive immunity; however, breastfeeding is not a substitute for immunization.

**Can breastfeeding mothers receive the measles vaccine?**

The measles vaccine is considered safe for breastfeeding mothers.

**Does MCDH have vaccines available for children?**

Yes, there are vaccines available for children who meet eligibility requirements. Call 815-334-4500 for these qualifications.

If you have any further questions please call MCDH at (815) 334-4500.