

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory disease that can lead to severe complications and in some cases death—especially in children under five years old.¹ **Getting vaccinated is the safest and most effective way to prevent the disease.** There is no specific treatment for measles, but thanks to vaccination, measles cases have dropped by 99% since the beginning of the 20th century.² Measles was officially declared eliminated from the United States in 2000. However, there have been several recent outbreaks, particularly in under-vaccinated communities.³



The safest and most effective way to prevent measles is through vaccination

There is no treatment for measles once infected. The most effective way to prevent the disease is with the **measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) or measles, mumps, rubella, varicella (MMRV) vaccine.** The MMR vaccine is 97% effective at preventing measles after two doses.⁴

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that:

- **Children** receive 2 doses of the MMR vaccine, the first dose at 12–15 months and the second at 4–6 years.⁵
- **Teens and adults** check with their healthcare provider to ensure they are up to date on MMR vaccines with either 1 or 2 doses, depending on risk factors, unless they have proof of immunity (which can include proof of vaccination, lab evidence of immunity, confirmed prior measles diagnosis, or birth before 1957).⁶

For individuals who received the measles vaccine between 1963 and 1967, healthcare professionals recommend receiving at least one additional dose.⁷

Talk to your healthcare provider if you're unsure about your or your child's vaccination status.



How measles spreads

Measles spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes and can linger in the air for up to 2 hours after the infected person has left.⁸ Because measles is so contagious, **up to 90% of unvaccinated people exposed will become infected.**⁹

Symptoms & Immediate Risks

Measles symptoms appear 7 to 14 days after exposure and may include:¹⁰

- ▶ **High Fever**
- ▶ **Cough**
- ▶ **Runny Nose**
- ▶ **Watery Eyes**
- ▶ **Rash**

Measles can also lead to more serious health complications, including:¹¹

- ▶ **Ear infections** in 1 in 10 children
- ▶ **Pneumonia** in 1 in 20 children
- ▶ **Brain swelling (encephalitis)** in 1 in 1,000 children
- ▶ **Hospitalization** in 1 in 5 unvaccinated people
- ▶ **Death** in 1–3 of every 1,000 children infected with measles

Long-Term Complications

Even after recovery, measles can cause serious long-term effects, including:^{12,13}

- ▶ **Immune amnesia:** Measles can erase your immune memory by destroying cells that “remember” how to fight off past infections, leaving you vulnerable to other diseases.
- ▶ **SSPE:** A rare but fatal degenerative brain disease that can occur 7–11 years after a measles infection — it is most common in children infected before age two.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/about/index.html>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/ncird-surveillance/media/VPD-morbidity-slide1-mmwr-508.pdf>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/index.html>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/vaccines/index.html>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/hcp/vaccine-considerations/index.html>

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/hcp/vaccine-considerations/index.html>

⁷ <https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/should-you-get-a-measles-vaccine-boost>

⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/causes/index.html>

⁹ <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/about/index.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/about/index.html>

¹¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/signs-symptoms/index.html>

¹² <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/03/17/nx-s1-5328765/measles-outbreak-health-risk>

¹³ <https://www.uchicagomedicine.org/forefront/pediatrics-articles/measles-is-still-a-very-dangerous-disease>