



# Measles

## What causes measles?

Measles is an infectious viral disease. Anyone can get measles if they have not been vaccinated or they have not had it before, although it is most common in young children. To be protected from measles and other infections including mumps and rubella, you need to be immunized with 2 doses of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (MMR).

## How common is measles in Malta?

Measles is now uncommon in Malta because of the effectiveness of vaccination and high uptake of the vaccine. Cases can however be imported from other countries. Measles is common in many countries around the world and there are currently several large measles outbreaks across Europe.

## How does measles spread?

Measles is spread from person to person through the air by infectious droplets when a person coughs or sneezes; it is highly contagious. You can catch measles by breathing in these droplets or, if the droplets have settled on a surface, by touching the surface and then placing your hands near your nose or mouth. The virus can survive on surfaces for a few hours.

People with measles are infectious from when the symptoms develop (usually 4 days before rash) until about four days after the rash first appears.

## What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms include:

- A high temperature (fever), which may reach around 40°C
- Cold-like symptoms, such as a runny nose, sneezing, and a cough
- Sore, red eyes that may be sensitive to light
- Small greyish-white spots on the inside of the cheeks (Koplik spots)

A few days later, a red-brown blotchy rash will appear. This usually starts on the head or upper neck, before spreading outwards to the rest of the body.





## **How long does it take to show signs of measles after being exposed?**

It takes between 7 and 21 days (most commonly 10-12 days) to develop symptoms after being infected. The measles rash does not usually appear until approximately 2–3 days after the fever begins.

## **How serious is measles?**

Measles can be unpleasant but will usually pass in about 7 to 10 days without causing any further problems. Once you've had measles, your body builds up resistance (immunity) to the virus and it is highly unlikely you will get it again. However, measles can lead to serious and potentially life-threatening complications in some people. These include infections of the lungs (pneumonia) and brain (encephalitis).

Complications from measles are more common among very young children (younger than five years), adults (older than 20 years) and people with compromised immune systems. Measles during pregnancy increases the risk of premature labour, miscarriage, and low-birth-weight infants.

## **How can measles be prevented?**

Measles can be prevented by taking the MMR vaccine. This is given in two doses as part of the national immunization programme. The first dose is given when the child is around 13 months old and a second dose is at 3-4 years of age.

Adults and older children can be vaccinated at any age if they have not been fully vaccinated before. Ask your GP about having the vaccination.

If you are unsure whether you are immune, contact your GP for a blood test (Measles IgG) to check immunity against measles.

## **How is measles diagnosed?**

Measles is diagnosed by a combination of the patient's symptoms and by laboratory tests.

## **Is there a treatment for measles?**

There is no specific treatment for measles. People with measles need bed rest, fluids, and control of fever. Patients with complications may need treatment specific to their problem.





## **What should be done if someone is exposed to measles?**

If you/your child have come in contact with a measles case while they were infectious and fall under the below mentioned categories please email Public Health on [idcu@gov.mt](mailto:idcu@gov.mt) for further assistance.

- People who are immunocompromised (including those who are receiving high-dose steroids, those on chemotherapy, who have received organ transplant, who have certain illnesses which affect their immune system such as HIV/AIDS)
- Pregnant women
- Those who are not immune (have not taken the MMR vaccine and who have no history of having had measles)
- Young babies under the age of 12 months

## **What should be done if someone is exposed to measles and develops symptoms suggestive of measles?**

If you have been in contact with a confirmed case of measles and you develop symptoms suggestive of measles between 7-21 days after being exposed, stay at home and call your doctor or health centre for proper guidance. Do not go out or go to health clinics to see a doctor as you might potentially infect other people.

***If you would like further information, please contact the Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Unit (IDCU) on 23266109/6122 Monday to Friday between 8am and 2pm.***

