

Measles

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Last Updated: June 17, 2025

UNDERSTANDING MEASLES

What is measles?

Measles is a very contagious illness that spreads from person to person. It is caused by a virus.

How serious is measles?

Measles can be very serious. About 20% of people infected with measles need to stay in the hospital. This is more common for children under 5 years of age and people with weakened immune systems. It can lead to pneumonia, brain swelling, pregnancy complications, or even death.

How does measles spread?

Measles is spread through the air by infectious respiratory particles from an infected person. The virus can stay in the air for up to two hours. People nearby can breathe in the infectious respiratory particles and get sick.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Measles usually starts with a fever, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes. The fever usually starts at 101°F, but can spike to 105°F. A rash shows up a few days later. The rash usually starts on the face and spreads down to the body and out to the arms and legs.

When is a person with measles contagious?

A person can spread measles to others from 4 days before the rash starts until 4 days after the rash appears.

Where can I learn more about measles prevention and updates in South Dakota?

Visit doh.sd.gov/diseases/measles for current guidance, prevention tips, and outbreak updates.

VACCINE PROTECTION & IMMUNITY

How can I protect myself from measles infection?

The measles vaccine (MMR) is the best way to prevent infection and is safer than immunity developed by infection.

How well does the measles vaccine work?

The measles vaccine is very effective. One dose protects 93 out of 100 people. Two doses protect 97 out of 100 people.

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Can I still get measles if I am vaccinated?

It is rare, but it is possible. No vaccine is 100% perfect. But vaccinated people who get measles usually have a milder illness. In the current outbreak, only 3% of cases have occurred among persons who had one or two doses of measles (MMR) vaccine.

How long does it take for the vaccine to work?

It takes about 2 weeks after getting the vaccine for your body to build full protection.

Who is considered protected or immune from measles?

You are considered protected or immune if you:

- Were born before 1957
- Got 2 doses of the MMR vaccine
- Have a blood test showing you are immune
- Already had measles in the past

Can adults get the MMR vaccine?

Yes. Adults can get the vaccine if they are not already protected.

Is there a risk to getting more than 2 doses of the measles vaccine (MMR)?

No. It is safe to get a third dose if needed, such as when traveling to countries with measles outbreaks.

What are the side effects of the measles vaccine?

Most people who receive the measles vaccine (MMR) don't experience any side effects. Those that do typically experience symptoms within the first 12 days. Those side effect symptoms might include soreness, swelling, redness at the vaccination side, fever, mild rash, or joint pain or stiffness.

I was vaccinated, but I had cancer and underwent chemotherapy. Am I still protected?

You should talk to your doctor. Chemotherapy can affect your immune system, so your doctor might recommend a blood test or another vaccine dose.

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VACCINE ACCESS AND RECORDS

Where can I get the MMR vaccine?

You can get the vaccine at most doctor's offices, clinics, and some pharmacies. You can also visit [VACCINES.GOV](https://www.vaccines.gov) and enter your zip code to find locations that offer vaccine. Call ahead to make sure they have it.

Is there a concern about running out of the vaccine?

No. There are no known shortages. Most healthcare providers in South Dakota should have access to the vaccine.

How can I get a copy of my vaccine record in South Dakota?

Go to [SD.gov/cs](https://sd.gov/cs) and search Immunization Records Request to access the online record request form.

Please note: To request your immunization records, you will need to create an account on the South Dakota Citizens Portal. A valid state-issued ID is required. The South Dakota Department of Health cannot process immunization records requests over the phone.

STEPS TO TAKE IF YOU'RE SICK OR EXPOSED

What should I do if I think I have measles?

Call your doctor or clinic before going in. They will tell you where to go when you arrive to avoid exposing others. Tell them about your symptoms and if you were around anyone with measles.

I was at a place where someone with measles had been. What should I do?

Monitor yourself for symptoms of measles for 21 days after you were exposed. If you are not immune, you can receive the measles vaccine in the first 72 hours (3 days) after exposure to interrupt the measles infection. If you are not immune and did not receive a dose of measles vaccine, you should also stay home during the time you are monitoring for symptoms. Some high-risk individuals can get immune globulin in the first 6 days after exposure to decrease the severity of infection. If you develop symptoms of measles, call your doctor immediately and tell them about your exposure to measles and the symptoms you have.

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