

Reviewed Dr. Sean O'Leary, pediatric infectious disease specialist, Children's Hospital Colorado

Measles is making a comeback in the U.S. From January 1 to April 3, 2015, 159 people were infected with measles in 18 states.* Most of these cases are part of a large, ongoing multi-state outbreak linked to Disneyland in California. The outbreak has many parents wondering why a disease many Americans have never seen is resurfacing and what they can do to protect their family. Here's what you need to know to keep yourself and your children healthy.

What is measles?

Measles, also called rubeola, is a highly contagious respiratory infection that's caused by a virus. Measles starts with a fever, runny nose, cough, red eyes, sore throat and sensitivity to light, and is followed by a rash that spreads all over the body. Measles can be serious, especially for young children. Even in previously healthy children measles can cause complications, including ear infections (1 in 10), pneumonia (up to 1 in 20), encephalitis or swelling of the brain (about 1 in 1,000) and death (1 in 1,000). Although rare, children who contract measles can also develop long term complications. Additionally, measles can cause severe complications in pregnant women.

How is it spread?

Measles is spread through the air from coughs or sneezes. It is one of the most contagious diseases on the planet. In fact, measles is so contagious that if one person has it, 90% of the people close to that person who are not immune will also become infected. People who have measles can spread the virus to others from four days before the rash to four days after the rash appears. The virus can live on infected surfaces and in airspaces for up to two hours.

How can I protect my child from measles?

Measles can be prevented with the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that all children receive two doses of MMR vaccine beginning at 12-15 months of age with a booster dose between 4 and 6 years of age. The vaccine takes about 10 days to two weeks to provide protection.



Is the measles vaccine safe?

Yes. Most people who get the measles vaccine do not experience side effects, although mild problems such as fever, pain at the injection site, or rash can occur. The risk of serious allergic reaction from MMR vaccine is very rare, about 1 in 1,000,000.

Is it too late to get my child immunized?

It's never too late to get vaccinated.

*19 previously reported measles cases in California were reclassified from 2015 cases to 2014 cases.

Hasn't measles been eliminated from the U.S.?

Since the measles vaccine was introduced in 1963, ongoing measles transmission was declared eliminated from the U.S. in 2000. Before widespread vaccination, measles caused an estimated 2.6 million deaths worldwide each year.

Measles can still be brought to the U.S. by travelers from any country where the disease still has not been eliminated or where outbreaks are occurring. We saw few cases in the U.S. until about 2011, but since then, due to slightly lower vaccination rates, we have seen increasing numbers of measles cases, with more cases in 2014 than any year since 1994.

Measles has remained common in many developing countries, and more than 20 million people are affected by measles each year.

What's happening in Colorado?

There has been one reported measles case in Colorado this year. That first case appears to have been contained by public health authorities. However, when measles enters a community, at least 95% of people need to be immunized to keep it from spreading. Unfortunately, in Colorado only about 86% of children are vaccinated against measles, so it is very possible we will see more cases with the current outbreak.

Should I worry about my child contracting measles?

If your child is 1 year or older and is following the recommended vaccine schedule, it is very unlikely he or she will get measles, even if exposed. The vaccine is effective in 95-99% of people. If your child is too young to be vaccinated (less than 12 months of age), or cannot be vaccinated because of a weakened immune system, it is important that those who care

for and have close contact with them are vaccinated. Babies younger than 12 months and people who have weakened immune systems are especially vulnerable to complications from measles.

If you are traveling outside the country, please refer to the CDC's travel immunization recommendations.

Do adults need to get vaccinated?

The CDC recommends that adults born after 1957 get the MMR vaccine. If you aren't sure whether you've been vaccinated, you can get a booster dose or check your antibody levels with a titer blood test. Talk with your health care provider to decide which is best for you.

How do I know if my child's school or day care facility is protected?

A new law in Colorado (House Bill 14-1288, effective July 1, 2014) requires schools and licensed child care facilities to disclose their immunization and vaccine exemption rates upon request. That means that anyone – including parents – can simply call and ask for the facility-wide rates.

Learn more at www.childrensimmunization.org.

What can I do to speak up for kids?

We advocate on behalf of kids in the public policy arena, making sure that their needs and concerns are heard when important decisions are made. We have many ways that you can get involved and participate. Join the Children's Hospital Colorado Grassroots Advocacy Network and the Colorado Children's Immunization Coalition to receive action alerts and learn how you can be a voice for Colorado kids!

For questions about measles or your child's health, please contact your child's health care provider or call the ParentSmart! Healthline: **720-777-0123**.

