



## Frequently asked questions about

# Measles

### From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

**What is measles?** Measles is an infectious viral disease that occurs most often in the late winter and spring. It begins with a fever that lasts for a couple of days, followed by a cough, runny nose, and conjunctivitis (pink eye). A rash starts on the face and upper neck, spreads down the back and then extends to the arms and hands, as well as the legs and feet. After about five days, the rash fades in the same order as it appeared.

**How can I catch measles?** Measles is highly contagious. Infected people are usually contagious from about 4 days before their rash starts to 4 days afterwards. When they sneeze or cough, droplets spray into the air and the droplets remain active and contagious on infected surfaces for up to two hours.

**How serious is the disease?** Measles itself is unpleasant, but the complications are dangerous. Six to 20 percent of the people who get the disease will get an ear infection, diarrhea, or even pneumonia. One out of 1000 people with measles will develop inflammation of the brain, and about one out of 1000 will die.

**Why is vaccination necessary?** Before the measles vaccine became available, there were approximately 450,000 measles cases and an average of 450 measles-associated deaths were reported each year. Widespread use of measles vaccine has led to a greater than 99% reduction in measles cases in the U.S. compared with the pre-vaccine era.

**Is measles still a problem in the United States?** We still see measles among visitors to the U.S. and among U.S. travelers returning from other countries. The measles viruses these travelers bring into our country sometimes cause outbreaks. However, because most people in the U.S. have been vaccinated, these outbreaks are usually small.

**What kind of vaccine is given to prevent measles?** The MMR vaccine prevents measles and two other viral diseases — mumps and rubella. These three vaccines are safe given together. MMR is an attenuated (weakened) live virus vaccine. This means that after injection, the virus grows, and causes a harmless infection in the vaccinated person with very few, if any symptoms. The person's immune system fights the infection caused by these weakened viruses and immunity develops which lasts throughout that person's life.

**How effective is MMR vaccine?** More than 95% of the people who receive a single dose of MMR will develop immunity to all three viruses. A second gives immunity to almost all of those who did not respond to the first dose.

-Over-

## Measles continued

### As an adult, do I need the MMR vaccine?

You do *not* need the MMR vaccine if you:

- had blood tests that show you are immune to measles, mumps, and rubella
- are a man born before 1957
- are a woman born before 1957 who is sure she is not having more children, has already had rubella vaccine, or has had a positive rubella test
- already had two doses of MMR or one dose of MMR plus a second dose of measles vaccine
- already had one dose of MMR and are not at high risk of measles exposure.

You *should* get the measles vaccine if you are not among the categories listed above, and

- are a college student, trade school student, or other student beyond high school
- work in a hospital or other medical facility
- travel internationally, or are a passenger on a cruise ship
- are a woman of childbearing age.

**Do people who received MMR in the 1960s need to have their dose repeated?** Not necessarily. People who have documentation of receiving LIVE measles vaccine in the 1960s do not need to be revaccinated. People who were vaccinated prior to 1968 with either inactivated (killed) measles vaccine or measles vaccine of unknown type should be revaccinated with at least one dose of live attenuated measles vaccine. This recommendation is intended to protect those who may have received killed measles vaccine, which was available in 1963-1967 and was not effective.

**I am two months pregnant. Is it safe for me to have my 15-month-old vaccinated with the MMR vaccine?** Yes. Measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine viruses are not transmitted from the vaccinated person, so MMR does not pose a risk to a pregnant household member.

**I am breast feeding my 2 month old baby. Is it safe for me to receive the MMR vaccine?** Yes. Breast feeding does not interfere with the response to MMR vaccine.

### What is the most common reaction following MMR vaccine?

Most people have no reaction. However, 5 percent to 10 percent of the people receiving the MMR vaccine experience a low grade fever and a mild rash.

For more information about measles and other health information, visit us on the web at:

[www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org)

Or call your local Health Department office at:

**Coldwater**  
279-9561 x 143

**Hillsdale**  
437-7395 x 107

**Sturgis**  
659-4013 x 109

**Three Rivers**  
273-2161 x 241