



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

Facts about Measles

Description:

Measles is a highly contagious viral illness.

Symptoms:

Measles begins with fever usually greater than 100°F, fatigue, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes. The rash is characteristically red with bumps and flat spots, and begins on the face along the hairline and behind the ears. Over the next 3 days the rash becomes generalized and is usually gone after 6 days. Symptoms typically appear 10 to 12 days after being exposed to someone with measles, but may appear as early as 7 days after exposure or as late as 18 days.

Complications:

Ear infections are the most common complication. Measles can also result in more serious complications, such as pneumonia, seizures, inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) and, rarely, death.

Transmission:

Measles is a highly contagious disease transmitted by droplets or direct contact with the nose/throat discharges of an infected person or, less commonly, by airborne spread. The virus may remain infectious in the air for up to two hours. A person is contagious from 4 days before rash onset through the first 5 days of rash.

Diagnosis:

Diagnosis should be made by a physician. Usually laboratory testing is required.

Treatment:

There is no specific treatment for measles.

Prevention:

Measles vaccine, which is contained in the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine, can prevent the disease (2 doses are needed for optimal protection). The first dose of the MMR vaccine is routinely given at age 12 – 15 months and the second dose at 4 – 6 years of age.