



Measles and the MMR Vaccine

Measles was declared eliminated in the United States in 2000, meaning that transmission of the disease had been interrupted within the U.S. population. Unfortunately, due to waning vaccination rates, measles infections and outbreaks have now reached the highest point over the past 30 years. Misinformation and disinformation surrounding vaccines have been rampant for decades and become more widespread through social media. These efforts are designed to confuse people and sow distrust. It's important for everyone to have accurate information when making medical decisions.

Measles is one of the most contagious infections in the world. Up to 9 out of 10 people who are susceptible to measles may become infected after close contact with someone who has the disease. Measles is spread through droplets from a sneeze or cough and can remain in the air for up to 2 hours afterward. Symptoms typically do not appear until a week after exposure and often include cold-like symptoms followed by high fever and rash.

Babies, young children, pregnant women, elderly, those with compromised immune systems and anyone who is not vaccinated against measles are all at higher risk for severe complications. This includes the need for hospitalization due to breathing difficulties or swelling of the brain, which can cause long-term health issues such as hearing loss and seizures. Death from measles can also occur.

Vaccines are used to train the immune system to recognize viruses and bacteria and prevent severe illness from these infections. Side effects are usually minor, with the most common being mild pain, swelling and redness at the injection site, and general achiness. These are normal effects as the immune system responds to the vaccine. While vaccines create a sort of "dress rehearsal" for fighting the illness, they do not give the vaccinated person an actual case of the disease.

The MMR vaccine combines protection against measles, mumps and rubella into one vaccine. It has been studied extensively and has a strong safety record and is highly effective at preventing measles. Extensive research has found no link between MMR vaccination and autism. In children who receive both recommended MMR doses, 97% will have lifelong protection. In most countries, including the U.S., there are no vaccines currently available that separate MMR into individual shots, and it is unlikely that such single shots would be available any time soon.

Children who are unvaccinated and are exposed to measles, even by walking through the same building within a few hours after someone with infection passes through, need to be quarantined for 21 days to make sure they do not become sick and spread to others. This means they cannot attend school, and parents often have to miss work to care for them.

It is important to understand that at least 95% of the community needs to be immune to measles in order to limit transmission of the disease and protect people who cannot be vaccinated. This high level of “community immunity” can’t happen unless people get vaccinated according to the recommended immunization schedules established by medical and scientific experts.

Allergists and immunologists care for children and adults who suffer from common chronic health conditions such as asthma, allergic rhinitis, eczema, and food allergies. These individuals are at higher risk for complications from any infection. In addition, millions of people have immune deficiencies or compromised immune systems and are unable to receive the measles vaccine. They rely on the rest of the community to be protected and decrease the spread of infection.

Allergists/immunologists recognize the importance of vaccination as a safe and effective way to prevent severe infections. There is no substitute for discussing any questions or concerns with your personal doctor or child’s pediatrician. They can help you navigate risks, benefits and expectations as you make your own informed decisions.

KEY POINTS

- Measles is extremely contagious.
- Up to 9 in 10 susceptible people may become infected after close contact.
- Measles can cause serious complications, including hospitalization, hearing loss and seizures.
- MMR is highly effective and has a strong safety record.
- 97% of children receiving both recommended doses will have lifelong protection.
- At least 95% community immunity is needed to limit transmission.
- Allergists/immunologists recognize the importance of vaccination as a safe and effective way to prevent severe infections.
- Talk with your doctor or pediatrician about any questions or concerns.

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