



Measles Questions and Answers

April 11, 2019

What's the local news about measles?

Eight unvaccinated children in northern Westchester have been diagnosed with measles. They do not attend public schools or daycare programs.

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious virus that causes fever, rash, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes. Tiny white spots may appear in the mouth and a rash may appear on the body two to four days after symptoms begin. Complications can include hearing loss, pneumonia, swelling of the brain and death.

How does measles spread?

Measles is a highly contagious virus that lives in the nose and throat mucus of an infected person. It can spread to others through coughing and sneezing. Measles virus can live for up to two hours in an airspace where the infected person coughed or sneezed.

Measles is so contagious that when exposed nine of ten people who are not immune will also become sick from the virus.

When is someone contagious?

An infected person can spread measles to others from four days before through four days after the rash appears. The person may not know they are sick.

How should I protect myself?

The best way to protect yourself from measles is to verify that you and your family members have been fully vaccinated with MMR. If you're unsure, get vaccinated. Wearing a mask does not prevent you from getting ill.

People who are unvaccinated risk getting sick and also spreading measles to people who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons, such as infants under 6 months of age, pregnant women and people who are immune-compromised.

How can I protect my child when there is measles in my community?

The Westchester County Department of Health recommends, in consultation with your healthcare provider, the following:

- Children 6 months through 11 months of age should get an MMR vaccine now to help give them some protection against measles. They will still have to get a vaccine at 12-15 months of age and again at 4-6 years of age.

- Children 1 through 3 years of age who have already received their first MMR vaccine should get a second MMR vaccine now, as long as 28 days have passed since the first MMR vaccine was given to them.
- Any adult who has not received their first MMR vaccine yet should get their first MMR vaccine now.

Families are always encouraged to practice good handwashing hygiene.

Is the vaccine safe and effective?

The MMR vaccine is very safe and effective. The first dose is about 93% effective at providing immunity. The second dose, given 28 or more days later, boosts that to 97%.

Getting MMR vaccine is much safer than getting measles, mumps or rubella. Most children who get the MMR vaccine have no side effects, and most people who get it do not have any serious problems with it. The side effects that do occur are usually very mild, such as a fever, rash, soreness or swelling where the shot was given, or temporary pain and stiffness in the joints, mostly in teens and adults.

If I'm not sure of my vaccine status, is it safe for me to go out in public?

If you are not vaccinated, you are at greater risk of getting sick if you have been exposed to someone with measles. Those who are unaware of their status and unable to get their vaccination records should get an MMR, as it is not harmful to receive additional doses.

If I get the MMR vaccine, can I give measles to someone who hasn't been vaccinated?

The MMR vaccine contains live, weakened virus, which protects you from measles by triggering your body's response to the virus. People with immunocompromised conditions should speak with their doctor/medical provider.

What should I do if I think I have measles?

Immediately call your doctor and let him or her know about your symptoms. Anyone who suspects they may have measles should not show up at a health care facility unannounced.

If my doctor or someone from the health department told me that I have measles, what should I do?

Stay home for four days after a rash develops to avoid spreading measles to other people. Talk to your doctor or local health department to discuss when it is safe to go back to work, school or other public places.

Call your doctor if you are concerned about your symptoms.

For more information, call the NYS Measles Hotline at 1-888-364-4837.