

- If a child or young adult has **not** received 2 doses of MMR vaccine, this can be given at any age.
- Because the MMR vaccine is a 'live' vaccine, it is **not** recommended that children who have a weakened immune system (e.g. because of medication or chemotherapy) should be vaccinated, so these children are particularly vulnerable and should avoid contact with someone with measles infection whenever possible.
- If you are pregnant and you have been in contact with measles always discuss this with your GP and/or midwife immediately so that you can be advised appropriately.

For more information about **Measles** contact:

*The Community Infection Prevention & Control Nurse*

*or*

*your midwife or obstetrician*

*or*

*your local Health Protection Unit*

*or*

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/topics>

Information produced by a collaboration between:

The Health Protection Agency North West,

North West Infection Prevention & Control Nurses

and

North West Environmental Health Officers.

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# HPA North West



## Measles

INFORMATION LEAFLET

## What is measles?

Measles is a highly infectious illness caused by a virus (germ).

## What are the symptoms of Measles infection?

Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Irritability
- Cold-like symptoms - running nose
- Sore and runny eyes
- Dry 'croupy' cough
- White spots on the gums (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> day)
- Rash (3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> day) starting on the face and behind the ears, then spreading down the body.
- Diarrhoea - often in the early stages in children.

Serious complications of Measles infection can occur such as

- ear infections (approx. 1 in 20);
- bronchitis/pneumonia (approx. 1 in 25);
- convulsions/fits (approx. 1 in 200);
- and in rare cases, encephalitis (infection of the brain) or meningitis (approx. 1 in 1000) may occur.

The likelihood of problems varies with age. Complications are generally more common in young babies, older children and adults.

## Who does Measles affect?

**ANYONE** - who has not developed natural immunity or has not been vaccinated against measles. Children are most vulnerable, but babies up to approximately 6 months generally have some protection from their mother's antibodies.

## What is the incubation period of Measles?

The incubation period (the period when someone has the infection but is not displaying symptoms) is on average 10 days.

## Is measles infectious?

**MEASLES IS VERY INFECTIOUS** and you catch it by being in close contact with someone who already has the infection. The virus is passed in the secretions of the infected person's nose and throat and is spread by their sneezing and coughing. It is possible to catch measles from direct contact with articles which have been contaminated by these infected secretions e.g. hankies or tissues.

## Do you need treatment?

There is no specific treatment for Measles infection but an appropriate medicine such as paracetamol to help bring down a high temperature should be used (**ASPIRIN SHOULD NOT BE USED IN CHILDREN UNDER 16 YEARS OF AGE**).

Also, if a secondary infection develops the doctor may prescribe antibiotics to treat this e.g. an ear or chest infection.

As soon as possible after the illness, a swab may be taken from the mouth of the infected person. This is to confirm if it was a definite case of measles. Your GP will be informed of the results.

## Do you need to stay off school /work / nursery?

**YES** - Measles is infectious from just before the symptoms first occur and for approximately 4 days after the appearance of the rash.

General advice is to stay off school or work for **at least 4 days after symptoms first develop**.

## How do you prevent getting measles infection?

- By avoiding close personal contact with a person with measles if you are at risk.
- **By immunisation** - there is a safe and effective vaccine, which protects against measles. It is one of the "M" components in **MMR** vaccine and a child needs **two doses of this vaccine**, one at 12 - 13 months and another dose pre-school.