

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious disease, prevalent mostly in childhood. However, adults can also contract the virus.

How is measles spread?

Measles is spread by contact with infected droplets that comes from the mouth or nose of an infected person when they breathe, cough or sneeze.

What are the signs and symptoms of measles?

- A high fever
- Runny nose
- A cough
- Red and watery eyes
- A rash that starts appearing after the fever. It looks like small, red, flat spots and start on the face and upper neck. The rash fades after 5 or 6 days.

How is measles diagnosed?

Measles should be considered in any person presenting with a fever and rash. Take the child to the clinic, or to a medical doctor who will do a blood test to confirm the diagnosis.

How is measles treated?

Treatment is directed at improving symptoms and preventing complications. A healthcare worker can offer advice on how to treat the symptoms.

Tips to care for a child at home who may have measles:

- Keep your child away from other people and do not send them to school or crèche, until the rash has cleared up for four (4) days.
- Keep the room dark where your child is resting.
- Make sure they drink a lot of clean water.
- Give the child healthy, fresh foods.

Are there complications linked to measles?

Yes. Complications may range from diarrhoea, dehydration and middle ear infection to more serious complications, such as brain infection (encephalitis), blindness and death. These complications are more common in children under 5 years, children who are malnourished, adults over the age of 30 and persons who are immunosuppressed.

If complications occur, seek medical assistance without delay.

Who is at risk of contracting measles?

Unvaccinated young children and any person who has not been vaccinated or was vaccinated, but did not develop immunity, is at risk of contracting measles.

Can measles be prevented?

Measles can be prevented with immunisation. The measles vaccine is safe and effective, and provides lifelong immunity against measles. In South Africa, children are given measles vaccinations at 6 months of age and again at 12 months. The vaccine is free at all City clinics.

How can I protect my child from contracting measles?

Ensure your child's immunisations are up to date. If you are unsure, take your child and their Road to Health Book to the clinic where a healthcare provider will check. If your child missed any of the vaccinations, the healthcare provider will advise you on the missed doses that will be administered.