

Quick Facts about Measles and Pregnancy

- Measles is a highly contagious disease that's preventable with the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine.
- Measles can be a serious disease for pregnant people, who are more likely to develop complications like pneumonia. It can cause pregnancy-related problems like preterm birth, low birth weight, infections in the newborn, stillbirth, and miscarriage.
- The MMR vaccine is typically administered during childhood. The first dose is given between 12 to 15 months of age and the second between 4 to 6 years of age.
- Adults who are unsure of their vaccination status and either don't have a written record that they were vaccinated or don't have written proof of immunity should get vaccinated.
- Because MMR is a live vaccine, it should not be given during pregnancy. People getting the MMR vaccine should wait at least 4 weeks before trying to get pregnant.

Measles is one of the most contagious diseases that affects humans. It can be a serious disease for pregnant people. Measles is almost entirely preventable with the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine.

From an all-time low in 2000, measles cases have been increasing in recent years. Most reported cases now happen in people who are not vaccinated or didn't complete their vaccinations as children.

Measles can be a serious disease for pregnant people. Pregnant individuals with measles are more likely to develop measles complications, such as pneumonia. Having measles also increases the risk of pregnancy problems such as preterm birth, low birth weight, infections in the newborn, stillbirth, and miscarriage.

Here's what you should know about measles and how to protect yourself and your baby.

How is measles spread?

Measles is caused by a virus that is easily spread. The virus can remain in the air for up to 2 hours after an infectious person coughs or sneezes. Just one infected person can cause 14 to 18 additional measles cases.

What does "being exposed to measles" mean?

Exposure to measles means being in the same room at the same time or within 2 hours of a person with measles.

What are the signs and symptoms of measles?

Measles symptoms can start anywhere from 6 to 21 days after being exposed to the virus, although 11 to 12 days is the average. A person may start spreading the virus to others before they develop symptoms.

Many people have no symptoms or only mild symptoms. When they occur, signs and symptoms may appear in the following order:

- Days 1 to 2: Fever, cough, runny nose, and sore eyes can occur. The fever may go very high (spike) to 104 or higher.
- Days 3 to 5: A rash begins on the face and spreads downward to the neck, upper and lower trunk, and arms and legs. The fever may spike to 104 or higher.
- Days 6 to 7: The rash starts to fade in the order it appeared.

Complications of measles occur in about 3 in 10 people and include ear infections, blindness, pneumonia, and brain inflammation. In the United States, death from measles is rare but can happen. In other countries, it is as high as 15%.

How could measles affect my pregnancy?

Pregnant people with measles have an increased risk of pneumonia, hospitalization, and the need for breathing support. Measles can also increase the risk of pregnancy complications, including miscarriage, stillbirth, low birth weight, and prematurity.

How do I know if I'm protected against measles?

You're protected against measles if you have a written record of one of the following:

- You had 2 doses of the measles vaccine as a child

- You had one dose of the measles vaccine as an adult
- You had measles as a child
- You had a blood test that shows you are immune to measles
- You were born before 1957

If you do not have a written record of one of the above, you should get 1 dose of the MMR vaccine as an adult.

Can I get the MMR vaccine while I am pregnant?

The MMR contains a live, weakened form of the measles virus. Pregnant people should not get the MMR during pregnancy. You can get the MMR vaccine:

- Before pregnancy, and wait at least 4 weeks after getting the MMR vaccine to get pregnant
- Anytime after you have your baby

Vaccination while breastfeeding is safe. Your family members can be safely vaccinated with MMR; they won't pass the virus to you.

What happens if I've been exposed to measles during pregnancy?

- Call your healthcare professional. They will ask if you have a written record of vaccination. If you don't, you can have a blood test to see if you are immune.
- If you have records showing you're vaccinated, or your blood test results show you're immune, no other care is needed. You're protected against measles.
- If you are not protected, a medication called immune globulin (IG) can be given within 6 days of being exposed to measles. This medication is given as a shot or through an IV.
- If you don't get measles, you should get the MMR vaccine after you give birth to your baby.

Measle Images



A measles rash after 3 days. (CDC/PHL)



Measles rash on a young child. (istock)

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