

MEASLES

WHAT IS MEASLES

Measles is an acute infection that is quite common in young children. It is also called *Rubeola*.

WHAT CAUSES MEASLES

It is caused by the Measles virus

HOW IS IT SPREAD

Measles spreads through the respiratory secretions of infected persons. It is extremely contagious and an infected person can spread the virus even before he becomes clinical ill, thus making it very difficult to control spread.

WHAT ARE THE CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS OF MEASLES

There are three clinical stages of the illness: 1) an incubation stage 2) a prodromal stage and 3) a final stage with the rash

The patient will not have any symptoms during the incubation period (the time from when he is exposed to the virus to when he becomes ill) – this phase is approximately 10-12 days.

The prodromal phase lasts 3-5 days and is characterized by moderate fever, a hacking cough, runny nose and conjunctivitis (redness of the conjunctiva). Soon grayish white dots appear inside the mouth, usually on the gums – these are called *Koplik's Spots* and are typical of measles. They appear and disappear very rapidly, usually within 12-18 hours.

The final stage of measles is characterized by the appearance of the measles rash. The rash usually starts on the neck but spreads rapidly and within 48 hours involves the entire body, including the face. The rash can vary greatly in character and may sometimes be bloody. The more severe the illness, the worse the rash. The temperature rises abruptly as the rash appears and often reaches 104-105°F. In uncomplicated measles, the rash starts to resolve by the 2nd or 3rd day and the temperature also drops. It is common to have some swelling of the lymph nodes (“glands”) in the neck. Abdominal pain may also be present. Infants and small children, especially those who are malnourished, may have ear infection, pneumonia, and gastrointestinal symptoms like diarrhea and vomiting.

IS MEASLES DANGEROUS

Measles is usually not dangerous, but complications can occur in very young patients and those who are malnourished or immunosuppressed.

WHAT ARE THE COMPLICATIONS OF MEASLES

Children with measles can get an additional ear infection. They can also get pneumonia, caused either by the virus itself or due to secondary bacterial infection. They may get laryngitis or bronchitis.

Measles can exacerbate an existing tuberculous lesion.

Occasionally, there may be involvement of the heart (myocarditis) or central nervous system (encephalomyelitis or encephalitis)

HOW IS MEASLES TREATED

There is no specific drug against the virus. Treatment is supportive, with fluids, bed rest and Paracetamol for fever. Do not give aspirin to children.

If there are any complications of measles, they must be treated accordingly. Vitamin A given orally has been found to help measles, especially in undernourished children.

Children with measles must be kept out of school until they have recovered.

WHAT IS THE PROGNOSIS

Most children will recover completely and the prognosis is excellent. Once someone has had measles, they usually become immune and won't get it again.

CAN MEASLES BE PREVENTED

There is a very effective vaccine against measles and it is usually administered as part of the normal childhood vaccinations. It is called MMR and protects against three viral illnesses – measles, mumps and rubella. The first dose is generally given between 12 and 15 months of age, and the second around the time of school entry.