How Adults Can Protect Themselves During a Measles Outbreak



The ongoing measles outbreak, which started in January 2025, has led to an increase in measles cases and measles-related deaths across the United States, among both children and adults.

> **What this means for you:** Adults whose immune systems are not prepared for measles with the help of a vaccine are at risk of infection and serious health complications.

Typically, people's immune systems are taught to recognize and resist measles infection through vaccinations given between ages 12 months and 12 years. Most people who receive two doses of the measles vaccine have effectively prepared their immune systems to respond to the disease for the rest of their lives. However, because those vaccinations occur so early in childhood, many adults may be unsure whether they have received the recommended vaccinations.

> **What this means for you:** Adults are eligible to receive a measles vaccine, even if there is a chance they've already received the vaccine. There are ways to check how prepared your immune system is to resist measles, which can help you decide whether getting the vaccine now is right for you.

How Measles Impacts Adults

Measles is a highly contagious virus that spreads when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or breathes. Up to 90% of people who are not vaccinated against measles will likely become infected if they are in close proximity to an infected person. The most common measles symptoms include:

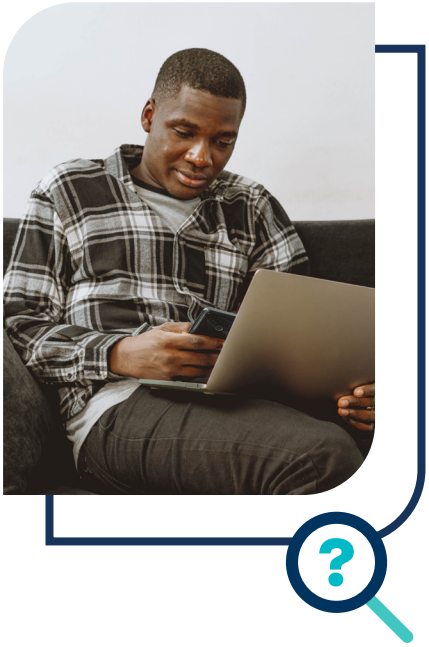
- Fever, which may be as high as 105 degrees Fahrenheit (40.6 degrees Celsius)
- Dry cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watering eyes, called conjunctivitis
- Rash

> **What this means for you:** People can spread the disease even before they know they are infected. A person can be contagious about four days before a rash appears, and until about four days after the rash starts.

One of the most important reasons to prepare your immune system against measles with vaccination is that **there is no treatment for measles.** When you are vaccinated, you not only help protect yourself from infection but also those in your community who are unable to protect themselves with a vaccination, such as people who are pregnant, children younger than 12 months of age, and people with compromised immune systems. This helps prevent serious to life-threatening health complications from measles in adults, including pneumonia, blindness, and brain swelling.

> **What this means for you:** Vaccination is the best way to help protect yourself and your community from measles complications and hospitalization, especially if you live or plan to travel to an area with an outbreak.

Checking How Prepared Your Immune System Is Against Measles As An Adult



First, try to access your current and childhood vaccination records by contacting your healthcare professional and/or former pediatrician. Ask for at least one of the following indicators of immunity from measles:

- Documentation of one dose (adult not at high risk) or two doses (adult at higher risk such as college students, healthcare workers, and international travelers) of the measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine administered on or after your first birthday.
  - ➔ **Tip:** If you were born before 1957, you are generally presumed to have protection from prior exposure to measles.
- Laboratory evidence that your immune system is capable of responding to measles. This is typically done through a blood test that measures measles antibody levels.
- Confirmation of a previous measles infection.

What this means for you: If you find you have one of these indicators of immunity against measles, you do not need to take further action.

If you are unsure how prepared your immune system is to resist and respond to measles, a healthcare professional can run a test for you or give you the vaccine. The American Academy of Family Physicians recommends one to two doses of MMR for adults born in 1957 or later.

What this means for you: If you receive only one dose of the MMR vaccine, you are 93% protected. A second dose of the MMR vaccine, given at least 28 days after the first, provides an additional boost to your immune system. Staying up to date on vaccination prepares your immune system so it can reduce or prevent symptoms, complications, and hospitalization, and strengthens your community's ability to control the continued spread of measles.

SOURCES

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