



Updated August 2011

Measles

[What is measles?](#)

[How do I catch it?](#)

[Where is it found?](#)

[What is my risk?](#)

[What are the symptoms?](#)

[Can it be treated?](#)

[Is there a vaccine?](#)

[How can I prevent measles?](#)

What is measles?

Measles is a very infectious illness caused by a virus called rubeola. For most people it causes a self-limited illness of fever, rash, cough and cold symptoms. However, the World Health Organization estimates that more than 150,000 people worldwide, most of them children under five years in developing countries, died from measles in 2008.

An effective vaccine to protect against measles is offered to all children in the United Kingdom (UK).

How do I catch it?

Measles spreads when someone with the virus coughs and sneezes and you breathe in their infected respiratory droplets.

Where is it found?

Measles occurs in all countries, but is less common in wealthy countries with good healthcare systems. Nevertheless several European countries, including the UK, have recently seen an increase in measles.

What is my risk?

If you have had the vaccine or are naturally protected (immune) after having measles you should not develop the illness. If you were born before 1970, you probably had measles and will be naturally immune.

What are the symptoms?

- An itchy, red rash, usually starting on the face and gradually spreading to the rest of your body.
- Coughs, sneezes and a runny nose.



- Fever, tiredness and aching muscles.
- Loss of appetite.
- Red, swollen, watery eyes, which may be sensitive to light.

Can it be treated?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Rest, painkillers and plenty of fluids can help with symptoms.

Is there a vaccine?

Yes, in the UK there is a combined vaccine, called [MMR](#), which protects against [measles](#), [mumps](#), and [rubella](#). This is a very safe and effective vaccine. It is given as part of the UK's routine childhood immunisations and can also be given to adults who have not previously had the vaccine.

MMR is made from live virus, so it should not be given to pregnant women or anyone whose immune system is not working properly.

How can I prevent measles?

Make sure your children are up to date with their routine MMR vaccines.

Babies aged from 6 months to one year who are being taken overseas to a country with many cases of measles, especially for a long time, can be given MMR early. If you are planning to take your baby abroad ask your GP, practice nurse or health visitor about this.

If you are an adult who never had MMR vaccine or the illness, you should have the vaccine.

Links

- [Health Protection Agency: Measles.](#)
- [NHS Choices: Measles.](#)
- [World Health Organization: Measles.](#)