Measles

What you need to know

Remember that measles, a serious childhood disease, can be prevented with a vaccine. Vaccines prevent many harmful diseases and are safe. Discuss any vaccine-related decisions with your child's pediatrician.

Signs and symptoms

While measles is probably best known for the full-body rash it causes, the first symptoms of the infection are usually the three C's:

- Hacking cough
- Coryza (runny nose)
- Conjunctivitis (pinkeye)

Other symptoms include:

- High fever (often as high as 104°F)
- Koplik's spots—small red spots with blue-white centers that appear inside the mouth

The measles rash typically appears on day four or five after exposure and has a red or reddish-brown blotchy appearance in light-skinned persons. The rash appears on the forehead, then spreads downward over the face, neck and body, then down to the arms and feet.

Prevention

Mothers who are immunized for measles pass protection for measles to their infants for about 6 months after birth. After 6 months of age, this maternal protection starts to disappear, requiring the need for immunization at 12 to 15 months.

After receipt of one measles, mumps, and rubella immunization (MMR) or measles, mumps, rubella and varicella immunization (MMRV), a child is 95 to 98 percent protected against measles.

A booster dose is then given to a child around 4 to 6 years of age. This second dose is needed for complete protection from measles.

Contact your child’s healthcare provider to discuss measles immunization

Call your child’s healthcare provider immediately if you suspect that your child:

- Is not immunized against measles.
- Has been exposed to someone with measles.
- May have measles.

It is important to contact your child's healthcare provider before going to their clinic or office to prevent spreading the disease to other people.

Visit choa.org/measles for more information on how to protect your child and others from the spread of the measles.