



Public Health Brief

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Coming to a County Near Us? – Not Yet!

This is about measles, what is currently happening, what you need to know about the disease, and what you should be doing. This is very important, as **measles is a serious disease**.

Measles is one of the most infectious diseases in the world, with high complication rates (including death), and is not a simple rash or cold. It can be deadly (first death just reported in Texas) or have life-long complications for children. There is no other way to say it. This sounds scary, because it is!

What is happening?

All eyes are on a Texas outbreak that is out of control. Here's the breakdown:

- As of today, cases have risen to [124 with 18 hospitalized](#). The vast majority of cases are unvaccinated and school-aged.
- This outbreak started in a tightly knit, unvaccinated pocket - specifically, a Mennonite community - but has now spread to five counties.
- This region has a low vaccination rate - one in five students is not vaccinated for measles, mumps, or rubella (MMR).

How bad is this going to get? No one knows. But an increase of 32 cases in three days means the "force of infection" is strong. In other words, this is spreading exponentially, leading to more cases.

Another outbreak ([9 cases](#)) is growing in a neighboring county in New Mexico. An epidemiological link to the Texas outbreak hasn't been made yet, so this may be a coincidence (although it's hard to imagine it is). Additional cases are being reported from Alaska, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and around the world.

How quickly each of these gets under control greatly depends on the state and local health departments' ability to respond quickly and effectively. This relies on the public's willingness to cooperate in case interviews, people's willingness to get vaccinated, and available resources and support.



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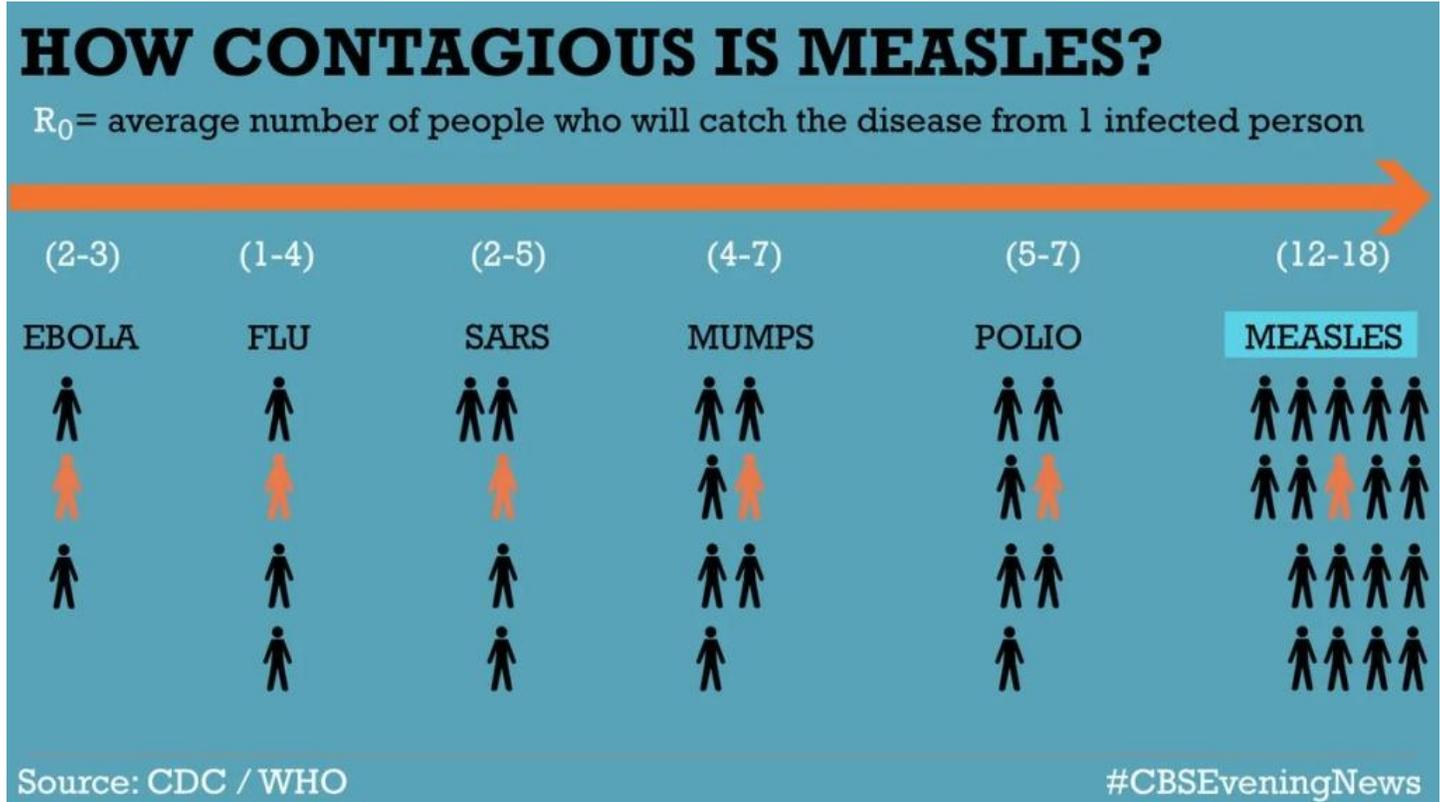
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What do you need to know about measles?

How contagious is measles? It is one of the most infectious diseases in the world:



How does a person become infected?

- 9 out of 10 people will become infected with measles if exposed and not protected through vaccines - **making measles one of the most infectious diseases in the world.**
- Measles can survive for 2 hours in the air or on infected surfaces (like doorknobs, light switches, tables, etc.) and spreads when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes.
- An infected person can transmit measles to others from 4 days prior to the rash start.
- Once infected, it usually takes 10-14 days to become symptomatic. At the beginning (4-7 days), symptoms include a running nose, cough, eye irritation (think red and watery), and



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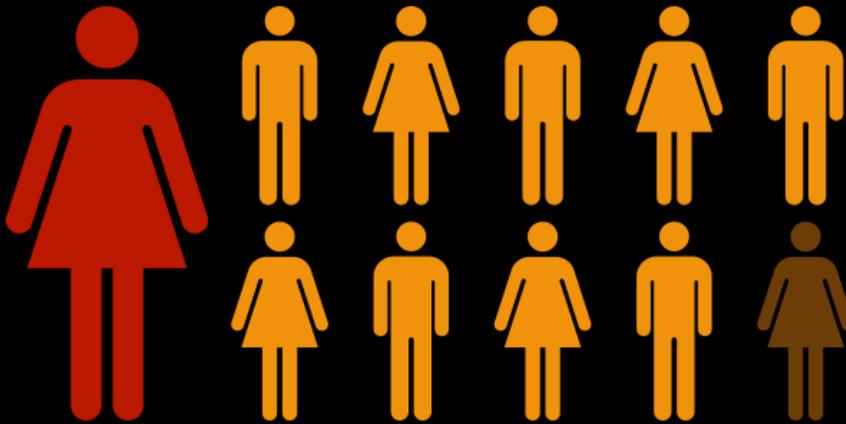
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white spots inside your cheeks. The characteristic rash begins 7-18 days after exposure, spreading from the face and upper neck first, and then to the hands and feet.

MEASLES



is **highly contagious** and spreads through the air when an infected person **coughs or sneezes**.



It is so contagious that if one person has it, **9 out of 10 people** of all ages around him or her will also become infected if they are not protected.

What are the symptoms?

Measles is known for its characteristic full body rash, starting at the hairline and moving downward along the body, and the '3 C's': "Cough", "Coryza" (runny nose), and "Conjunctivitis" (red, watery, irritated eyes). Here is the timeline:



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MEASLES SYMPTOMS TIMELINE

Measles isn't just a little rash,
it can be very dangerous



You (or your parents) had measles as a child and did fine, so why all the fuss?

- Measles infects the respiratory tract and then spreads throughout the body.
- Measles can also cause a very high fever, and ~20% of measles patients are hospitalized. Up to 1 in 20 patients may develop pneumonia, and 1-3 per 1,000 patients will die.
- Complications include blindness, brain swelling/damage, pneumonia or other breathing problems, severe diarrhea leading to dehydration, and infections. **30% of children infected with measles develop a complication.** For pregnant women, measles can be super dangerous to her and the baby.



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- I had measles as a child and saw many cases while in a refugee camp in South Vietnam in the 1970's. Having actually seen measles cases, complications, and deaths up close, the illness is not something I would want to risk for myself, my friends, or my family. In addition to the previously mentioned risks, patients can rarely (7-11/100,000 patients) develop [subacute sclerosing panencephalitis \(SSPE\)](#), a progressive neurological complication that strikes up to 10 years after acute measles infections, and invariably leads to death. I don't want to see another case of SSPE ever again!
- Recent research has also identified that measles infection can cause ['immune amnesia' – where measles patients face immune suppression for a few years after acute infection.](#)
- **There is no specific treatment for measles, but there is an excellent vaccine for prevention!**

What does all this mean to you?

- If you are in an area with an outbreak:
 - Pay attention to local public health department communication, including areas where cases have been to avoid measles exposures.
 - If you have a child under 12 months old, they can get a vaccine early (at 6 months). Talk to your pediatrician.
 - If you're up to date with vaccines, you are very well protected.
- If you're not in a hot zone (Alpine County and the surrounding area is NOT a hot zone.):
 - Reconsider travel to West Texas, especially if you have a baby under 12 months of age, because they have no protection against measles.
 - If you were born after 1957 and vaccinated before 1968, getting [another dose is a good idea](#). You got an older vaccine that used an inactivated virus, which doesn't work as well.
 - Consider getting an additional dose prior to international travel.
 - For more details, refer to: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/mmr/public/index.html>



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And finally, I must say something about the anti-vax sentiment which is ultimately the cause of these outbreaks.

Measles is preventable with childhood vaccinations but people aren't getting the vaccines. I'm frustrated because people are believing the anti-vax sentiments being spread all over the internet right now. And, because RFK Jr. is about to make it worse.

Recently, RFK Jr. was confirmed as the Health and Human Services Secretary. For years he has spewed conspiracy theories about vaccines, including the one about vaccines causing autism. The false claim about autism being caused by vaccines has been widely debunked over and over again. This claim started in 1998 when Andrew Wakefield and colleagues published a paper claiming that the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine caused autism - a paper that has since been retracted due to scientific misconduct (really bad and fraudulent science).

A recent study with 657,461 children, one of the largest ever on the MMR vaccine (for context, the debunked Wakefield study mentioned above had only 12 children), looked specifically at the connection between the MMR vaccine and autism. The conclusion: MMR does not cause autism. To further prove the point, researchers looked at a subgroup of children at higher risk of autism, such as having a sibling with autism, and concluded the same: MMR does not cause autism. Decades of other studies have had the same result. The journals that published these two studies are some of the highest and most respected scientific journals with rigorous standards of excellent science. In other words, they are as legit as they come. Study after study after study debunked those claims - but the damage had already been done in fueling the anti-vax movement. The real data with hundreds of thousands of children show that MMR vaccines are safe and effective against diseases that could kill children. If you would like to chat with me about this issue, coffee on me! Send me an e-mail.

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