

# Measles: Preventing the Spread in School Settings

## What is measles?

Measles is a very contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. Before the measles vaccine became available, measles was a common childhood disease. Measles is considered the most deadly of all childhood rash/fever illnesses. Symptoms include: rash, high fever, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes.

## How do people get measles?

Measles is easily spread from person to person. When an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes, the virus is released into the air and enters another person's body through the nose, mouth or throat. People can also become sick if they come in contact with the mucus or saliva (spit) from an infected person. The measles virus can live on contaminated surfaces and in the air for up to two hours. Measles may be transmitted from 4 days before through 4 days after rash onset.

## Are there complications with a measles virus infection?

Yes. Common complications include ear infections and diarrhea. Severe complications include pneumonia (infection of the lungs), encephalitis (swelling of the brain), and death. Measles may cause pregnant women to give birth prematurely or have low-birth-weight babies.

## How can a school prevent and control measles?

- Get vaccinated! Measles is a vaccine-preventable disease. One dose of measles vaccine is about 93% effective at preventing measles if exposed to the virus and two doses are about 97% effective. For NJ school vaccination requirements, visit: <http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/imm.shtml>
- **Practice healthy habits:**
  - Don't attend school and work while you are sick.
  - Wash hands frequently. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub that contains at least 60% alcohol.
  - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when coughing or sneezing.
  - Avoid sharing utensils, water bottles or other items contaminated by saliva or respiratory secretions.

### **If a person is exposed, does that mean they will get sick or infected with measles?**

An exposure occurs when a person is in the same space (e.g. room, office, waiting room, building) with someone who has measles, or occupies this space for up to 2 hours after the infected person has left. People are less likely to get sick with measles if they have been appropriately vaccinated. Approximately 90 percent of susceptible people will get measles if they are exposed to someone with the disease.

### **When should children and staff be excluded from school?**

The decision to exclude students/staff will be made in consultation with public health authorities. However, in the school setting, parents should know that if their child is not vaccinated and a case of measles occurs in the school, their child may be excluded until 21 days after rash onset in the last case of measles. Excluded students may be readmitted immediately if they are vaccinated within 72 hours of exposure.

### **Should schools be closed during an outbreak of measles?**

The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) generally does not recommend school closure for outbreaks of infectious diseases. The decision to close a school is an administrative decision and one that should be made only after consultation with public health officials and the district medical personnel.

### **Where can I get more information?**

- NJDOH Measles Information: <http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/measles/index.shtml>
- NJDOH Prevention and Control Measures for Outbreaks in School and Daycare Settings: <http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/outbreaks.shtml>
- Directory of Local Health Departments in NJ [localhealth.nj.gov](http://localhealth.nj.gov)