

There is an outbreak of measles currently in South Devon and Public Health England are encouraging individuals and families who may not have been vaccinated to consider it in order to protect themselves and others. **Measles is a highly infectious viral illness that can be very unpleasant and sometimes lead to serious complications.** It's estimated around 1 in every 5,000 people with measles will die as a result of the infection. **It's now uncommon in the UK because of the effectiveness of vaccination.**



Anyone can get measles if they haven't been vaccinated or they haven't had it before, although it's most common in young children.

The infection usually clears in around 7 to 10 days.

### Who's most at risk?

Complications of measles are more likely to develop in certain groups of people, including:

- babies younger than one year old
- anyone with a weakened immune system, such as those with leukaemia
- teenagers and adults who may not have had the MMR vaccination. It was introduced in 1988 but uptake fell in 1998 following adverse publicity which has now been discredited. It has only recently reached effective levels of uptake in young children

### Symptoms of measles

The initial symptoms of measles develop around 10 days after you're infected. These can include:

- cold-like symptoms, such as a runny nose, sneezing, and a cough
- sore, red eyes that may be sensitive to light
- a high temperature (fever), which may reach around 40C (104F)

- small greyish-white spots on the inside of the cheeks

A few days later, a red-brown blotchy rash will appear. This usually starts on the head or upper neck, before spreading outwards to the rest of the body.

### When to see your GP

You should contact your GP as soon as possible if you suspect that you or your child may have measles.

It's best to phone before your visit as your GP surgery may need to make arrangements to reduce the risk of spreading the infection to others.

You should also see your GP if you've been in close contact with someone who has measles and you've not been fully vaccinated (had two doses of the MMR vaccine) or haven't had the infection before – even if you don't have any symptoms.

### Is measles serious?

Measles can be unpleasant, but will usually pass in about 7 to 10 days without causing any further problems.

Once you've had measles, your body builds up resistance (immunity) to the virus and it's highly unlikely you'll get it again.

However, measles can lead to serious and potentially life-threatening complications in some people. These include infections of the lungs (pneumonia) and brain (encephalitis).

### How measles is spread

The measles virus is contained in the millions of tiny droplets that come out of the nose and mouth when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

You can easily catch measles by breathing in these droplets or, if the droplets have settled on a surface, by touching the surface and then placing your hands near your nose or mouth. The virus can survive on surfaces for a few hours.

People with measles are infectious from when the symptoms develop until about four days after the rash first appears.

### How measles can be prevented

Measles can be prevented by having the [measles, mumps and rubella \(MMR\) vaccine](#).

This is given in two doses as part of the NHS childhood vaccination programme. The first dose is given when your child is around 13 months old and a second dose is given before your child starts school.

Adults and older children can be vaccinated at any age if they haven't been fully vaccinated before. Ask your GP about having the vaccination.

If the MMR vaccine isn't suitable for you, a treatment called human normal immunoglobulin (HNIG) can be used if you're at immediate risk of catching measles.

### Treating measles

There are several things you can do to help relieve your symptoms and reduce the risk of spreading the infection, including:

- taking paracetamol or ibuprofen to relieve fever, aches and pains – aspirin should not be given to children under 16 years old
- drinking plenty of water to avoid dehydration
- closing the curtains to help reduce light sensitivity
- using damp cotton wool to clean the eyes
- staying off school or work for at least four days from when the rash first appears

In severe cases, especially if there are complications, you or your child may need to be admitted to hospital for treatment.

### How common is measles?

The effectiveness of the MMR vaccine means that cases of measles are uncommon in the UK nowadays. However, the number of cases has risen in recent years and there have been some high-profile outbreaks.

It's thought the rise in the number of cases of measles is the result of parents not getting their child vaccinated with the MMR vaccine, probably because of speculation linking MMR to [autism](#).

Publicity in **1998** highlighted a report claiming there was a link between the MMR jab and autism. However, numerous studies undertaken to investigate this claim found [no link between the MMR vaccine and autism](#).

A small, square image showing a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature appears to be 'Debra' followed by a stylized flourish.

Professor Debra Laphorne  
PHE Director for the South West  
Follaton House Totnes  
TQ9 5NE  
[debra.laphorne@phe.gov.uk](mailto:debra.laphorne@phe.gov.uk)