

# Measles

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**What is measles?**

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. Measles is most common in late winter and spring.

**Who gets measles?**

The measles virus can infect any person of any age who has not previously had the disease or the measles vaccine.

**How is measles spread?**

The infection is highly contagious and spread by airborne droplets and by direct contact with nose or throat secretions of infected persons. A person is contagious from about 4 days before the rash starts until 4 days after the rash develops.

**How common is measles?**

Widespread use of the measles vaccine in the United States makes it very rare in this country. There can occasionally be outbreaks among visitors to the United States and travelers returning from other countries, but these are usually very small.

**What are the symptoms of measles?**

Symptoms start about seven to ten days after being exposed to the measles and last from one to two weeks. The illness begins with a runny nose, watery eyes, cough, and high fever. After two to three days, tiny white spots may appear on the inner cheeks, gums, and roof of mouth, surrounded by redness. Two to four days after symptoms appear, a raised, red rash starts on the face and spreads down the body and out to the arms and legs. The rash usually lasts five to six days.

**What is the treatment for measles?**

There is no specific treatment or medicine to cure measles. Bed rest, increased fluids, cool or warm compresses, and Tylenol can be used to reduce fever and discomfort. The sick person should stay at home until four days after the appearance of the rash.

**Are there complications from measles?**

Approximately 30% of reported measles cases experience one or more complications such as diarrhea, ear infections, or pneumonia. These complications are more common among children under 5 years of age and adults over 20 years old. One out of 1,000 people infected will develop encephalitis (inflammation of the brain that can result in deafness or mental retardation) and about one out of 1,000 will die. During pregnancy, measles may cause pre-term labor, birth defects, or the loss of the unborn baby.

**How can measles be prevented?**

Routine immunizations with 2 doses of measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine (MMR) can

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provide up to 99% immunity. The first dose is recommended at 12 months of age and the second dose before entering school, around 4 - 6 years of age. The two doses of vaccine normally provide lifelong immunity.

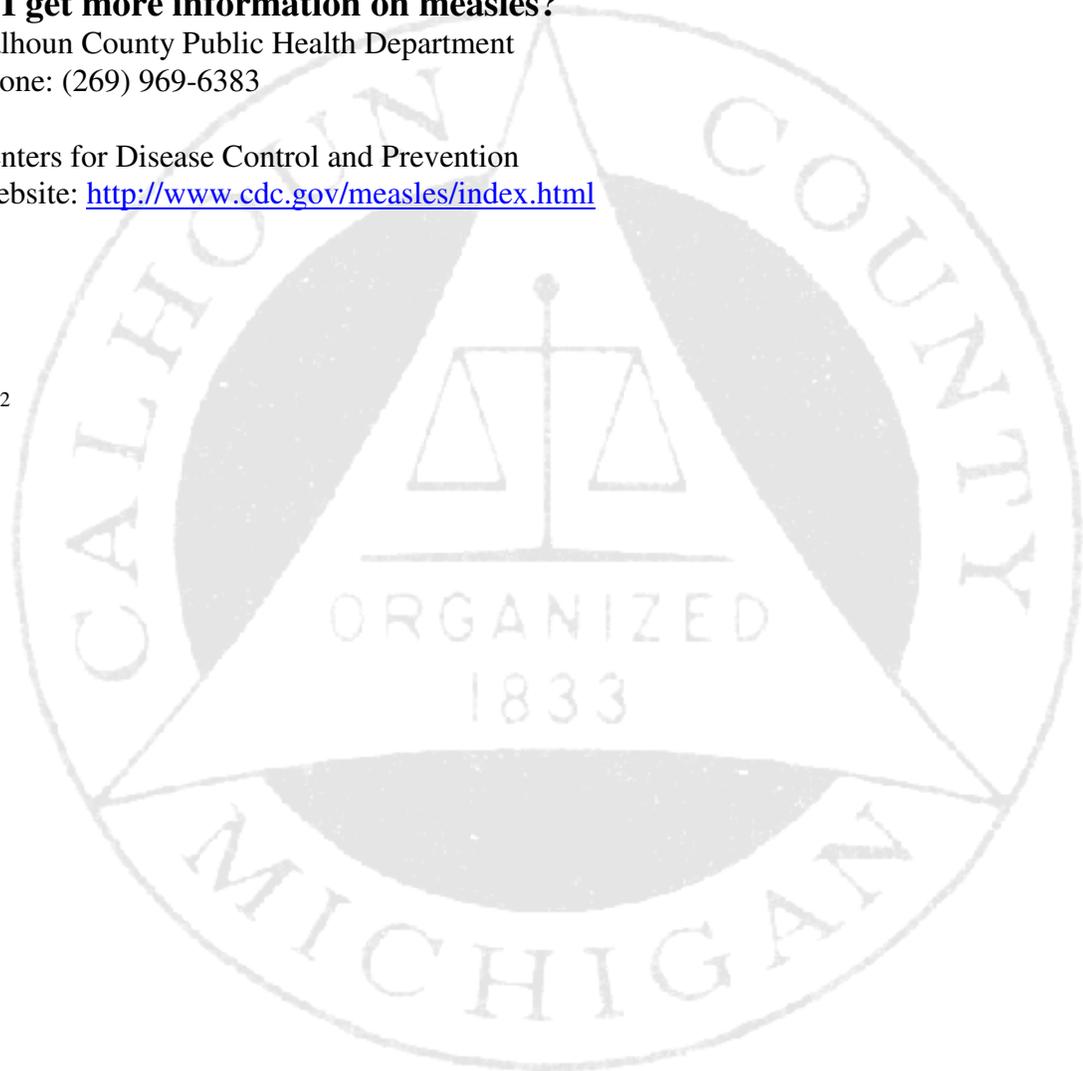
Available immunization data suggests that if live vaccine is given within 72 hours of being exposed, you may be protected. Immune globulin may be used within 6 days of exposure for people who might be at risk for complications.

### **How do I get more information on measles?**

Calhoun County Public Health Department  
Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/measles/index.html>

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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