

# measles

Measles is a highly contagious respiratory virus that causes febrile rash illness and is reportable to the South Carolina Department of Public Health (DPH), [2025 SC List of Reportable Conditions](#). Measles has been eliminated (no sustained circulation) in the United States for decades. However, there can still be measles cases, as **it is easily imported by unvaccinated travelers and can spread in under-immunized communities.**

## Disease course

The incubation period is typically 11–12 days from exposure to measles virus until the first symptoms appear (prodromal symptoms). A rash follows the prodromal symptoms two to four days later and usually lasts five to six days. Measles is infectious four days before and four days after rash onset.

## Symptoms

**Prodromal:** Fever, cough, coryza, or conjunctivitis. Koplik spots (tiny white spots inside the mouth) may also appear two to three days after symptoms first appear.

**Rash:** A maculopapular rash (rash of both flat and raised skin lesions) begins on the head and face and then spreads downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs, and feet. The spots may become joined together as they spread from the head to the body. Fever may spike to more than 104° F when rash appears.

## Complications

**Most common complications:** Diarrhea and otitis media.

**Most severe complications:** Pneumonia, encephalitis, and death. Patients may require hospitalization. Children younger than 5, adults older than 20, pregnant women, and immunocompromised people are at most risk of serious complications.

## What to do if you have a suspected case

1. Immediately mask and isolate the patient in a room with a closed door (negative pressure room if available). Follow standard and airborne precautions.
2. Only allow health care workers with presumptive evidence of measles immunity\* to attend the patient; they must use N-95 masks.
3. Evaluate the patient and order measles confirmatory testing (collect a throat or nasopharyngeal swab for RT-PCR and serum for IgM measles testing).
4. Contact infection control if available at your facility.
5. Immediately report this suspected case to your local and/or state health department.
6. For questions regarding specimen collection, storage, and shipment, please visit [PHL-Guide-to-Laboratory-Services-8-24.pdf](#)

\*Written documentation of adequate vaccines for measles, mumps, and rubella, laboratory evidence of immunity or confirmed disease, or birth before 1957

### Resources

[Measles \(Rubeola\) | South Carolina Department of Public Health](#)  
[AAP Measles](#)