

Treatment of Measles

With the advent of immunizations, measles seems to be a thing of the past. But not everyone has been immunized. Do you know what to do if someone you care for gets measles?

Measles, also known as rubeola, is an infectious viral disease that primarily affects the respiratory system and occurs in winter and spring. The common symptoms of measles include fever, a hacking cough, runny nose, conjunctivitis, and a spreading rash, some of which last about 2 weeks. Serious and rare complications can result from measles, such as pneumonia, hepatitis, and brain inflammation (encephalitis). Immediate medical treatment should be obtained if there is any sign of these developing. Measles symptoms and complications are usually much more severe in adults.

Because measles is caused by a virus, it cannot be treated by antibiotics. And, like most viral illnesses, a measles infection (in most cases) can simply be left to run its course.

In many cases, measles treatment simply involves treatment of the symptoms, with paracetamol, regular rinsing of the mouth, and plenty of fluids to drink.

If you suspect that your child has measles, contact your child's doctor. Close contact with your doctor will let you monitor your child's progress and will help identify the onset of any complications.

At home, it is important to regularly monitor the sufferer's progress and check for the onset of any complications before they have a chance to become serious or life threatening. The sufferer's temperature should be monitored, and a written record should be kept of the readings, dates, and times. If the temperature climbs above 103 degrees Fahrenheit (39.4 degrees Celsius), seek medical advice.

It is also beneficial and safe to use acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and other medications to bring down a fever.

WARNING: DO NOT USE ASPIRIN. Unless instructed by your child's doctor, don't give aspirin to a child who has a viral illness, as the use of aspirin in such cases has been associated with the development of Reyes Syndrome, a serious and potentially deadly encephalitis-like illness. Instead, use acetaminophen and ibuprofen.

As with most viral diseases, there is no specific antiviral therapy, and the basic treatment consists of providing necessary supportive therapy to control the symptoms and make the sufferer as comfortable as possible. Encourage your child to drink clear fluids: water, fruit juice, tea, and lemonade. Fluids help the body replace water lost during the heat and sweating of fever episodes. Fluids also reduce lung infections (pneumonia) because they reduce the viscosity of lung secretions, stopping them from clogging breathing passages.

A cool-mist vaporizer will help relieve the cough and soothe the breathing passages. To avoid the formation of mold, clean the vaporizer daily. Avoid hot-water and steam vaporizers because they can cause accidental burns or scalds to children.

Vitamin A supplements are believed to improve the outcome of measles if the patient is deficient in it.

Children with measles should rest and avoid TV, busy activities, bright lights, and reading. It is usually safe for children to return to school 7 to 10 days after the fever and rash have subsided.

If a person's immune system is weakened by measles, they will be more susceptible to other bacterial infections, especially in the ears and lungs. When this happens, antibiotics should be obtained to control secondary bacterial infections.

People who have a measles rash and fever are infectious and should minimize the risk contact with other people to reduce the chances of spreading the disease to others who may be susceptible to measles.

Even in developed countries, where vaccination programs are common, there are misinformed people who refuse vaccination for themselves and/or their children. To protect these people, and visitors to your area from other countries who have not been vaccinated, contact should be limited until a medical diagnosis has been established excluding measles, or the symptoms resolve completely, or 7-10 days after the fever and rash have subsided.

Persons who are potentially infectious with measles should avoid public transport (including commercial airlines) and crowded indoor areas.

Before visiting a clinic or hospital, people who suspect they may have measles should call ahead before so that arrangements may be made to minimize the exposure of others to measles.