

Measles

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS



What is measles and how does it spread?

- Measles is a highly contagious viral illness. Symptoms include high fever, cough, runny nose and red, watery eyes. After three to five days, a rash appears, usually on the head or face. As the days pass, the rash spreads to other parts of the body.
- Measles spreads from person-to-person. It spreads when someone who has measles talks, coughs or sneezes near others. The virus can also live in the air and on surfaces for up to two hours after a person who has measles was in the area.
- Measles can be transmitted four days prior to rash onset through four days after rash onset.

How effective are vaccines against measles?

- The MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine is highly effective at preventing measles illness. One dose is 93% effective and two doses are 97% effective.

How can I prepare for an outbreak in my school?

- Save the contact number for the communicable disease nurse at your [local health department](#). This is the first call you should make if any staff or student is suspected of having measles. If unavailable, call the NC Epidemiologist On-Call at 919-733-3419.
- Ask for staff to be aware of their [immunization status](#) and locate records that show they are immune to measles, including any of the following:
- Written documentation of vaccination
- Laboratory reports of past illness or immunity.
- Ensure staff understand that if they do not have proof of immunity they will have to stay home from work if they are exposed to measles.
- Maintain current vaccination records for all students.
- Identify all susceptible students in your school before an outbreak occurs. Susceptible students include:
 - Students who have no immunization record on file

- Students with an immunization record but without MMR vaccine documented
- Students who have a documented exemption to the MMR vaccine

- Maintain a list of students who do not have proof of immunization or immunity. In the case of an exposure, they will have to stay home from school for 21 days after their most recent exposure unless they get post-exposure prophylaxis within the appropriate timeframe. This **includes** students with a medical or religious exemption.
- Students and staff who need to complete their MMR series should contact their health care provider or local health department as soon as possible.
- Have a preparedness plan in place for your school in the event of an outbreak that:
 - Assigns responsibility for contacting the local health department.
 - Includes a plan to isolate any suspected cases in the facility until they can be taken home by a parent or guardian.

When can children/staff return to school?

These are general guidelines. Consult with your local health department on these decisions.

- A child or staff member who has measles may return to school on the fifth day after rash onset.
- Someone who was exposed to measles may return to school:
 - After proof of immunity is confirmed, **or**
 - After getting the MMR vaccine within 72 hours of exposure, **or**
 - After the 21st day following exposure if MMR vaccine or immunoglobulin is not received, **or**
 - After the 21st day following exposure after getting immunoglobulin as post-exposure prophylaxis.

What is considered “proof of immunity”?

- Written documentation of adequate vaccination, including:
 - One or more doses of a measles-containing vaccine administered on or after the first birthday is sufficient for most individuals to be considered immune after exposure to measles.
 - Note: Two doses of a measles-containing vaccine, administered at least 28 days apart, is required by North Carolina state law for school-age children. Adults at high risk, including college students, health care workers and international travelers, are also recommended to have two doses.
- Birth before 1957
- Laboratory confirmation of disease
- Laboratory evidence of immunity (documented positive Rubeola/Measles IgG)

Are there restrictions on someone who was exposed but has proof of immunity?

- People with proof of immunity do not need to quarantine and may attend school.
- Two doses of the MMR vaccine are 97% effective at preventing measles, but there is a small risk that a person who was vaccinated can become infected. It’s important for staff and parents/guardians to know about measles symptoms and what to do if they or their child develop symptoms.
- [Get a shareable fact sheet](#) (multiple languages available)

What if a student or staff member has measles or is exposed to measles?

Public health staff will:

- Interview the person with measles (or their parent/guardian if it is a child)
- Identify all persons potentially exposed to measles
- Offer post-exposure prophylaxis to exposed people who were exposed and do not have proof of immunity.
- Provide guidance around staying home from school/activities



- Coordinate with school staff and administration around all of the above activities

[What people can expect during public health outreach for infectious diseases](#)

When and how should we communicate a confirmed case with parents/guardians and our school?

- Work with public health staff to immediately notify parents/guardians of students who are susceptible to measles.
- During an outbreak, children and staff who are exposed but not vaccinated against measles must stay home for up to 21 days after the date of the last exposure. The local health department will provide detailed guidance to all families and staff members.
- Notify the wider school community of the situation by email or written letter.

Where can I find more information and resources?

Reach out to your local/regional health department point of contact. If you are unable to reach your local health department, call the North Carolina Epidemiologist On-Call (available 24/7) at 919-733-3419. The North Carolina Immunization Program Nurse On-Call is available during business hours at 919-707-5575.

- [DHHS Measles \(Rubeola\) Webpage](#)
- [3/3/2025 NC DHHS Memo: Increase in Measles Cases in the United States](#)
- Measles Basic Information Handout in [English](#), [Spanish](#), [Russian](#), and [Ukrainian](#)
- [CDC Clinical Overview of Measles](#)
- [School Infection Prevention Guidance from CDC](#)

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