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Facts About Measles and the Measles Vaccine

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Measles is highly contagious and deadly. With outbreaks spreading in Texas and several other states, it is important to separate fact from fiction about measles and the vaccine.

Measles is not just a rash. It is an extremely serious disease.

About 20% of unvaccinated people who are infected end up in the hospital. Severe measles can lead to severe pneumonia and brain swelling, causing lasting damage, including blindness, deafness, and intellectual disabilities. For every 1,000 children who are infected, one or two will die. Measles was common before 1963, when the vaccine was approved. In the decade before that, roughly 1,000 people suffered brain damage and 400-500 people died from measles each year. [About Measles | Measles \(Rubeola\) | CDC](#)

Measles destroys immunity.

New research shows that measles destroys immune cells. People who recover from measles lose their immunity to other illnesses from prior infections or from vaccinations. Measles survivors are left more vulnerable. This discovery indicates that the true death toll from measles before 1963 is much higher than we thought. [Long-term measles-induced immunomodulation increases overall childhood infectious disease mortality | Science](#)

There is no treatment for measles infection.

There is no anti-viral medication for measles that will prevent severe disease. Once a person is infected, the only thing that can be done for them is supportive care. Vitamins and cod liver oil do not treat the illness.

Measles is one of the most contagious diseases.

In a community with low vaccination rates, measles spreads quickly. One infected person can infect nine out of ten people who have not been vaccinated. This is why outbreaks spread when vaccination rates fall. We need 93-95% of the population to be vaccinated for herd immunity to protect people who cannot get the vaccine.

The vaccine is effective.

Even one dose can work quickly to provide protection for people who have not been vaccinated. The first dose is more than 93% effective. The second dose provides more than 97% protection. Widespread vaccination against measles was so effective that the US could declare the disease eliminated in 2000—rare cases were usually the result of infection acquired in other countries.

The vaccine is safe.

The MMR and MMRV vaccines (measles, mumps, rubella and varicella) have been exhaustively studied. The medical community, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, stands behind the safety and benefits of these vaccines. No link to autism has been found in extensive, unbiased scientific research. The Centers for Disease Prevention and Control has been tracking vaccines reactions since 1990.

[Measles Vaccination | Measles \(Rubeola\) | CDC](#)

For more information, see <https://go.aft.org/healthhub>.

For questions contact 4healthandsafety@aft.org.

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