Introduction
Measles is an acute, viral illness. It is most common in the spring and fall. Measles is considered highly contagious. The disease is spread through the respiratory tract by airborne droplets that are released when a person coughs or sneezes. Anyone who has not been vaccinated against measles and is exposed will likely contract the disease. In developed countries, most measles outbreaks occur in adolescents and young adults who have not been immunized.

Stages of illness
Measles can be divided into four stages of illness.

- **Incubation Period:** This generally lasts from 10-14 days. However, variations have been reported. During the incubation period, patients do not have any symptoms.

- **Prodrome Period:** During this period, symptoms appear. They usually begin 10-14 days after exposure. Common symptoms include: fever, fatigue, decreased appetite, red watery eyes, runny nose and cough. Other symptoms may include: vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, sore throat, swollen glands and an enlarged spleen. The prodrome usually lasts 2-3 days. However, it can last up to eight days.

- **Exanthem (Rash) Period:** During this period, a rash develops. The rash usually starts on the face and spreads to the neck, trunk, arms and legs. Often, patients will start to feel better about 48 hours after the rash appears. The rash starts to fade within 3-4 days after it appears. There may be some fine peeling of the skin after the rash fades. Patients are considered highly contagious from four days prior till four days after the onset of the rash.

- **Recovery Period:** A cough may last for 1-2 weeks after the measles infection.

Treatment
Due to the viral nature of measles, treatment focuses on decreasing symptoms.

- Your eyes may be sensitive to light and have an irritating discharge. Wash your eyes by gently wiping them with a clean, wet washcloth. Do not rub your eyes. Keep the lights dim or the room dark. Wearing sunglasses may be helpful.
- Use non-aspirin, over-the-counter medication such as Tylenol (acetaminophen) to reduce fever and pain.
- Get extra rest and stay well hydrated with plenty of fluids such as water, Sprite, bouillon, juice, milk and popsicles.
- Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet.
- Humidified air, such as a cool mist vaporizer or pans of water in the room, may decrease the cough.

Prevention
The best way to reduce the risk of contracting measles is to be immunized with the measles vaccine. This can be given in the combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine commonly referred to as a MMR vaccine. While the vaccine is not a 100% guarantee against ever getting the measles, it significantly reduces the risk.

Important points
Complications from the measles can be serious. These include: pneumonia, encephalitis, myocarditis, pericarditis and hepatitis. The serious complications tend to occur more frequently in developing countries and in immunocompromised patients.

Notify your health care provider if you have any of the following:

- Fever after the rash has broken out
- Headache not relieved with medication
- Ear pain
- Decreased or loss of hearing
- Increased cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Abdominal pain
- Excessive drowsiness
- Nausea and vomiting
- Laryngitis
- Neck stiffness


If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: [http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu](http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu)