

What to Know About Measles

In the 10 years before a measles vaccine was available in 1963, nearly all children got measles by 15 years old. Each year, 3 to 4 million people in the U.S. were infected, about 400-500 people died, 48,000 hospitalized, & 1,000 suffered encephalitis (swelling of the brain) from measles.

In 2000, the United States declared that measles was eliminated from this country. The U.S. eliminated measles because it has a highly effective measles vaccine, a strong vaccination program that achieves high vaccine coverage in children, and a strong public health system for detecting and responding to measles cases and outbreaks.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines measles elimination as the absence of continuous disease transmission for 12 months or more in a specific geographic area.

If measles is eliminated, why do people still get it in the United States? Every year, unvaccinated travelers, American or international visitors, get measles while they are in other countries and bring measles in to the United States. They can spread measles to other people who are not protected against measles, which sometimes leads to outbreaks. This can occur in communities with unvaccinated people.

Measles is highly contagious, so anyone who is not protected against measles is at risk of getting the disease. People who are unvaccinated for any reason, including those who refuse vaccination, risk getting infected with measles and spreading it to others. They may spread measles to people who cannot get vaccinated because they are too young or have specific health conditions.

CDC considers you protected from measles if you have written documentation (records) showing at least one of the following:

You received two doses of measles-containing vaccine, and you are a school-aged child (grades K-12) or an adult who will be in a setting that poses a high risk for measles transmission, including students at post-high school education institutions, healthcare personnel, and international travelers.

You received one dose of measles-containing vaccine, and you are a preschool-aged child or an adult who will not be in a high-risk setting for measles transmission.

A laboratory confirmed that you had measles at some point in your life.

A laboratory confirmed that you are immune to measles.

You were born before 1957.

Vaccines are one of the top public health achievements because they have reduced or even eliminated many diseases.