



Measles: K-12 School Guidance

October 2026

Measles is highly contagious and can lead to serious health complications. Schools play an important role in preventing the spread of measles by preparing in advance and responding promptly when cases occur. This document outlines steps schools can take to prepare for measles and reflects the current recommendations for responding to measles in school settings.

Report confirmed or suspected measles cases immediately to the Delaware County Health Department via the 24/7 Wellness Line at (484) 276-2100.

KEY POINTS

- Measles is highly contagious and can spread rapidly among susceptible individuals, especially in school settings. If one person has measles, up to **9 in 10 exposed people will become infected if they are not protected** through MMR immunization or previous infection.
- The measles virus spreads when an infected person **breathes, coughs, or sneezes** and can remain infectious in the air for up to **two hours** after an infected person has left the room.
- A person with measles can spread the virus from **four days before the rash appears** through **four days after the rash appears**. The average time from exposure to rash onset is approximately 14 days, with a range of 7 to 21 days.
- **Measles can cause health complications**, including ear infections and diarrhea. More serious complications may include pneumonia and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). In some cases, measles can be life-threatening. Approximately **1 in 5 people who develop measles will be hospitalized**.
- **The MMR vaccine is the best way to protect against measles**. Two doses of the MMR vaccine are 97% effective in preventing measles, and one dose is 93% effective in preventing measles.
- People who are not protected against measles may need to **stay home for 21 days** each time they are exposed to someone who has measles.
- If someone is exposed to measles and is not vaccinated and was born after 1956, or has a weakened immune system, instruct them to **call their doctor** and ask about getting the **measles vaccine (MMR) within 72 hours** of exposure, or **immune globulin**, when indicated, **within six days** of exposure to help prevent serious health effects of measles.

HOW SCHOOLS CAN PREPARE FOR MEASLES

❖ Identify and notify at-risk individuals

- Maintain documentation of measles immunity status for all staff and students. Identify and notify individuals who are presumed to be susceptible to measles.
 - Individuals born after 1956 who are not fully vaccinated against measles and do not have lab-confirmed immunity are presumed to be susceptible to measles.
 - Inform students, families, and staff members that individuals exposed to measles may be excluded from school for 21 days if they are not fully vaccinated and cannot provide evidence of immunity.

- Recommend that these individuals receive the MMR vaccine when appropriate. Advise them to discuss vaccination with their healthcare provider if they are unsure about receiving the MMR vaccine.
- ❖ **Share measles plans with parents and staff**
 - Schools are encouraged to proactively communicate with families and staff regarding measles preparedness plans, including MMR vaccination requirements, measles isolation protocols, and the potential exclusion of unprotected students from school for up to 21 days following a measles exposure.
- ❖ **Strengthen general health messaging**
 - Remind students and staff to stay at home when they are sick.
 - Promote proper respiratory hygiene, including covering coughs and sneezes.
 - Encourage frequent handwashing and routine cleaning of high-touch surfaces.
- ❖ **Monitor for signs and symptoms**
 - Educate staff on the signs and symptoms of measles and establish a clear plan for responding to suspected cases.
 - Early symptoms typically include a high fever, cough, runny nose, and conjunctivitis (red, watery eyes), followed by Koplik spots (tiny white spots in the mouth) and a rash.
 - Measles can be transmitted beginning four days before the onset of the rash. Because the initial signs of measles mirror other respiratory illnesses, it may be difficult to identify measles unless there are known cases in the area.
- ❖ **Prepare to respond to measles**
 - Identify a designated isolation room where individuals with suspected measles can remain isolated until they can leave the school. The isolation room should have a door that can be closed and (preferably) windows that can be opened to the outdoors.
 - Ensure appropriate personal protective equipment is available, including standard masks (for symptomatic individuals) and N95 respirators (preferred for school nurses or other personnel responding to a suspected measles case).

SCHOOL RESPONSE ACTIONS FOR SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED CASES

- ❖ **Immediately isolate individuals with symptoms of measles**
 - If an individual presents with or develops measles symptoms while at school, immediately isolate them from others, provide a mask, and arrange for them to leave school as soon as possible.
 - If they cannot leave the school immediately, they should stay in a designated isolation room away from others. The isolation room should have a door that can be closed and (preferably) windows that can be opened to the outdoors. Individuals should continue to wear a mask while isolating.
 - Individuals with measles symptoms should seek evaluation by a healthcare provider or at an urgent care as soon as possible and call ahead before seeking in-person care.
- ❖ **Notify the Delaware County Health Department**
 - If a student or staff member is suspected of having measles, immediately contact the local health department at (484) 276-2100.
 - Do not wait for a positive test result to notify the health department.

❖ **Identify and notify exposed individuals**

- Create a list of individuals who may have been exposed, including students, staff, and others who were present beginning four days before rash onset. Collect the following information:
 - Student/staff first and last name, parent/guardian first and last name, address, phone number, date of birth, classroom of student/staff, bus/transport information, MMR vaccination status and administration dates.
- Notify individuals that they have been exposed to measles and inform them of school exclusion and readmission requirements.
 - Recommend that individuals who are at high risk or presumed susceptible to measles contact their healthcare provider immediately to discuss post-exposure prophylaxis (MMR vaccine for <72 hours, immune globulin for <6 days).

❖ **Exclude students and staff from school activities**

- **Individuals with confirmed measles:** Remain at home away from others and public spaces for four days following the onset of the rash (with the day of onset as “day 0”).
- **Individuals exposed to measles:** The health department will work with schools to help identify exposed individuals and determine appropriate exclusion periods.
 - **Individuals who are presumed susceptible to measles:**
 - Staff and students who are unable to provide evidence of immunity to measles must be excluded from school and other activities for 21 days following their most recent exposure.
 - ◆ Staff and students who receive one dose of the MMR vaccine as post-exposure prophylaxis within 72 hours after their initial exposure to measles may return to school. Proof that the MMR vaccine was administered is required.
 - ◆ Individuals who receive measles immune globulin as post-exposure prophylaxis will still need to be excluded.
 - **Individuals who have evidence of immunity to measles:**
 - Exclusion is not required.
 - Monitor for symptoms of measles for 21 days after exposure.

Additional Resources:

[Measles: Information to Prevent Spread in School and Child Care Settings – PA Department of Health](#)

[Measles Fact Sheet for Parents and Guardians – PA Department of Health](#)

[Measles Fact Sheet – PA Department of Health](#)

[Preparing and Responding to Measles: Checklist for K-12 Schools – CDC](#)

[School Nurse Guide: Immediate Response to Measles – Delaware County Health Department](#)