

# 5 Things to Know About Measles

An outbreak of about [100 cases of measles](#) in California has trained a spotlight on the threat posed by the disease and unvaccinated children.

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ByJeanne Whalen

## 1. Should I Be Worried My Children Will Get Measles?

If they've been vaccinated, the chances are low. The recommended two doses of measles vaccine, most commonly given via the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) combination shot, is 97% effective at preventing measles, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And that protection lasts a lifetime, says **William Schaffner**, professor of preventive medicine and infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville.

## 2. Should I Be Worried About Other People Not Vaccinating?

Yes. Unvaccinated people can spread measles to babies under one year old, who are too young to be vaccinated themselves. They also can spread it to children who cannot be vaccinated because they suffer from cancer or some other illnesses which weaken their immune system to the point they can't be safely vaccinated. And roughly 3 out of 100 vaccinated people can still get infected.

## 3. Is the Vaccine Hurting My Children?

No. Measles vaccine, most commonly given via the combination MMR shot, is "extraordinarily safe" and has been given to hundreds of millions of children around the world, Dr. Schaffner notes. Despite some parents' fears, numerous studies have debunked the theory that measles vaccine or MMR might cause autism, including a 2004 review of epidemiological studies by the U.S. Institute of Medicine. The original 1998 study that suggested a possible link was ultimately retracted by the medical journal that published it, which called the author's work "irresponsible and dishonest." There is also "no evidence" that vaccines can overwhelm a child's immune system, as some parents fear, Dr. Schaffner says. MMR, like most vaccines, does have rare side effects. Temporary low platelet count, which can temporarily cause a bleeding disorder, occurs in about 1 of every 30,000 doses. Serious allergic reactions occur in less than 1 out of a million doses, the CDC says.

## **4. Is America at Risk for a Major Measles Epidemic?**

Thanks to generally high levels of vaccination in the U.S.–94.7% of kindergarteners in the 2013-2014 school year according to a CDC survey—a chaotic epidemic is unlikely.

## **5. Can Measles Be Deadly?**

Yes. One or two out of every 1,000 children who contract measles will die from it, according to the CDC. Globally, an estimated 145,700 children died from measles in 2013, the CDC adds. Measles can also cause serious complications such as pneumonia, swelling of the brain, deafness, seizures and mental retardation. Young children are at particular risk. Before measles vaccination became common in the U.S. in 1963, about 400 to 500 people died each year from measles, 48,000 were hospitalized, and 1,000 developed chronic disability, the CDC says.