Measles is Back in the News. Here's What Pregnant Women Should Know.

By MotherToBaby and experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

At 16 weeks pregnant, Maria is busy planning a summer trip for her family. But lately, every time she opens her phone, she sees another headline about measles outbreaks.

It makes her pause and wonder: ***What does this mean for me and my baby?***

What is measles, and why are people worried about it?

Measles is a highly contagious virus that spreads through the air when someone who is sick with measles coughs or sneezes. Since measles spreads so easily, up to nine out of 10 unvaccinated people who come into close contact with someone who has measles will become infected.

Symptoms often include high fever, cough, runny nose, red eyes, and rash. Measles can lead to serious health complications and severe illness. During 2025, about 1 in 10 people with measles were hospitalized.

In recent years, the United States has seen a rise in measles cases. In the past, measles has mostly affected children, but there are also recent increases among people of reproductive age. In 2025, nearly a third of measles cases (1 out of 3) were in adults 20 years of age or older. So far in 2026, nearly a quarter of measles cases (1 out of 4) have occurred in adults. This trend is one reason Maria may feel especially worried.

Why is measles infection concerning during pregnancy?

When you are pregnant, your body changes in many ways. These changes can increase your chances of getting sick from infections during pregnancy.

For example, if you are pregnant and get measles, you have a higher chance of:

- Being hospitalized
- Developing pneumonia
- Rarely, death

Measles during pregnancy can also increase the chance of health problems for the baby, such as:

- Pregnancy loss (including miscarriage or stillbirth)
- Preterm birth
- Low birthweight

Measles can also pass from mother to baby if an infection happens during pregnancy. This can cause serious illness in newborns, hearing loss, and—very rarely—a fatal brain condition called subacute sclerosing panencephalitis, or SSPE, years later.

Even after birth, measles can be dangerous for babies who are too young to get vaccinated against measles.

How can I protect myself and my baby from measles?

This was Maria's main question as she started planning her trip. When she talked with her healthcare team, she learned that the MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine is the best protection against measles. Luckily, Maria had received this vaccine when she was younger.

If you are not up to date with vaccinations, the ideal time to get the MMR vaccine is at least one month before becoming pregnant. The MMR vaccine is ***not*** recommended during pregnancy. However, it can be given after delivery, even while breastfeeding.

If you are not sure whether you have immunity against measles, talk with your healthcare provider. MotherToBaby has a tool to help you start the conversation. While it is important to weigh the risks and benefits of any vaccine with your healthcare provider, serious reactions from MMR vaccination are rare.

After delivery, when you start taking your baby to their well-child visits, talk with your baby's healthcare provider about the MMR vaccine and ask any questions you may have. Starting conversations early can help you feel confident when it is time for your baby to get vaccinated.

What should I do if I am planning to travel soon or live in an area with a current measles outbreak?

This was also a key question on Maria's mind. She brought it up with her healthcare provider, and together they talked

about her vaccination status as well the status of others in her household. They also looked up the measles activity at her summer trip location and talked about watching for symptoms of measles for 21 days after travel. If you are pregnant, these are helpful steps to take.

If a measles outbreak is happening near where you live, follow local recommendations. Consider avoiding crowded public settings and avoid contact with people who are sick. Encourage people around you (partners, family members, caregivers) to be up to date on MMR vaccination to help protect you and your baby.

What should I do if I am exposed to measles while pregnant?

If Maria is exposed to measles during her trip, her first step would be to call her healthcare provider's office right away. They can tell her what to do next and how to get into the office safely, if needed, to avoid exposing others.

For pregnant patients who are not immune to measles or do not know if they are immune, they could be given antibodies called immune globulin (IG) after a measles exposure. If you have measles during pregnancy, talk to your baby's healthcare provider about IG, which might also be recommended for your newborn.

What if I develop symptoms of measles while pregnant?

If you develop a fever and rash, especially if you live in an area with measles or have recently traveled, call your healthcare provider right away, and they can provide further instructions. Be sure to tell them if you have received the MMR vaccine before and where you have traveled.

A few key points:

- Fever in early pregnancy can pose risks, especially if it lasts for a long period of time. Talk with your healthcare provider about how best to treat your fever with fever-reducing medications.
- Taking extra Vitamin A is ***not*** recommended during pregnancy because high doses can increase the chance of certain birth defects.

What should I know if I am breastfeeding?

Measles is not spread through breast milk, and infants can receive breast milk from a mother with measles infection. Follow guidance from your healthcare team on precautions, which may include staying away from nonvaccinated people, expressing breast milk, and having a person who is not sick feed your infant your breast milk. Or, they may

recommend you wear a mask and practice careful hygiene when breastfeeding and caring for your newborn.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding and unsure about your immunity to measles or worried about exposure, you are not the only one with these questions. As with Maria, your healthcare provider and MotherToBaby are here to help answer any questions you may have.

References

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