



NHL

# NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

A division of the  
NATIONAL HEALTH LABORATORY SERVICE



NICD

## Frequently Asked Questions about Measles Vaccine For the General Public

### Why vaccinate?

- Measles is usually a self limiting disease but can lead to serious complications like pneumonia, blindness, encephalitis (brain infection) or even death.
- Vaccination is easy, inexpensive, safe and very effective at preventing disease.

### How does the measles vaccine work?

- The measles vaccine is a live attenuated vaccine, which means that it is a weakened version of the virus itself. The vaccine cannot cause disease but allows the body to prepare itself for a real infection.
- Immunity after vaccination is usually life-long.

### Who must be vaccinated and when?

- All children should be vaccinated at a young age, and the vaccine is included in the South African Expanded Programme on Immunizations (EPI) schedule. The vaccine is given at 9 months and repeated at 18 months of age.
- Older children, adolescents and adults may also be vaccinated during outbreaks of measles, particularly if they have a high-risk of developing complications.

### Who should not be vaccinated?

- People who have had a life-threatening reaction after receiving a previous measles vaccine.

- Pregnant woman should generally not receive the vaccine and must take necessary precautions to prevent pregnancy until four weeks after immunization.
- Persons with severely compromised immune systems (including leukaemia & lymphoma and certain cancers) should not receive the vaccine.
- Persons receiving chemotherapy, radiation therapy or high-dose corticosteroids should not receive the vaccine.
- Persons living with HIV are at risk for complications of measles and should therefore receive vaccine.
- If you are not sure whether you should be receiving the vaccine or not (due illness or chronic medication) please contact your doctor first.

### What side effects (adverse reactions) can occur?

- The most common side effects or adverse reactions are fever and a mild rash (which occurs in less than 5% of people). These are harmless side effects and do not last long.
- Serious side effects include allergic reactions but are very rare.

### Can the vaccine cause autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

- No, scientific evidence shows that measles vaccine does not cause autism or ADHD.

### Can the vaccine itself cause measles?

- The vaccine does not cause measles, but may cause mild measles-like symptoms which disappear within a short period of time.

### Can persons with an egg allergy be vaccinated?

- A known egg allergy is not a valid reason to avoid the measles vaccine.

### Can measles vaccine be given with other vaccines?

- The vaccine can be given in together with other vaccines.

### Where can I learn more?

- [www.who.int/immunization](http://www.who.int/immunization),
- [www.vaccinesafety.edu](http://www.vaccinesafety.edu)
- [www.cisppmmunize.org](http://www.cisppmmunize.org)