

Complications from Measles FAQ

What are some complications that might occur after a measles infection?

About 30% of measles cases develop one or more complications, including

- **Pneumonia**, which is the complication that is most often the cause of death in young children.
- **Ear infections** occur in about 1 in 10 measles cases and permanent loss of hearing can result.
- **Diarrhea** is reported in about 8% of cases.

These complications are more common among children under 5 years of age and adults over 20 years old.

Even in previously healthy children, measles can be a serious illness requiring hospitalization. As many as 1 out of every 20 children with measles gets pneumonia, and about 1 child in every 1,000 who get measles will develop **encephalitis**. (This is an inflammation of the brain that can lead to convulsions, and can leave the child deaf or mentally retarded.)

Measles also can make a pregnant woman have a miscarriage, give birth prematurely, or have a low-birth-weight baby.

Can measles lead to death?

For every 1,000 children who get measles, 1 or 2 will die from it. It can also cause SSPE which is subacute sclerosing panencephalitis. SSPE is a very rare, but fatal degenerative disease of the central nervous system that results from a measles virus infection acquired earlier in life. Data shows us that during the outbreak of measles in the United States during 1989-1991, a rate of 4-11 cases of SSPE per 100,000 cases of measles.