Infectious Childhood Diseases:

An Informed Parent's Guide

Information for parents about certain infectious diseases

Learn how to detect and help prevent **certain** infectious diseases that can occur in early childhood.
Click each disease to learn more.

Rotavirus

Measles

IPD*

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis B

RSV†

Pertussis

Actor Portrayal

*IPD, invasive pneumococcal disease.
†RSV, respiratory syncytial virus.

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What Is Rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a common virus that is easy to catch. It infects the stomach and intestines, causing symptoms like diarrhea and vomiting. Rotavirus commonly spreads in families, hospitals, and child care centers with symptoms usually starting about two days after a person is exposed to the virus. Some symptoms can last three to eight days.

How Does Rotavirus Spread?

Rotavirus usually spreads through contaminated hands or objects that have the virus on them. Rotavirus can live on surfaces for a long time. Only certain disinfectants can kill rotavirus. Many common soaps don't work.

Signs and Symptoms of Rotavirus

- Severe watery diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Stomach pain
- Dehydration
- Loss of appetite

Potential Risks and Complications

Although usually self-limiting, severe illness can result in dehydration with shock, or, on rare occasion, even death.

Are you prepared to talk with your child's doctor?

If you have questions about vaccines, have an open conversation with your health care provider.

It's OK to be curious. Interested in learning more?
Visit **whyvaccines.com**

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What Is Measles?

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease and can cause serious health complications, especially in children younger than 5 years old.

How Common Is Measles?

By 2000, due to effective use of vaccines along with collaborative efforts with public health organizations and health care professionals, measles was declared eliminated from the US. However, outbreaks continue to occur. In 2025 (as of September 10, 2025), a total of 1,454 confirmed measles cases were reported by 42 states in the US, of which 12% were hospitalized.

How Does Measles Spread?

The disease spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes, with symptoms appearing seven to 14 days after contact with the virus.

Signs and Symptoms of Measles

- Fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes
- Spots in mouth
- Rash

Potential Risks and Complications

Complications from measles include ear infections in about 1 in 10 children and diarrhea in fewer than 1 in 10 cases. Some children may suffer from severe complications, such as pneumonia (infection of the lungs) and encephalitis (infection of the brain).

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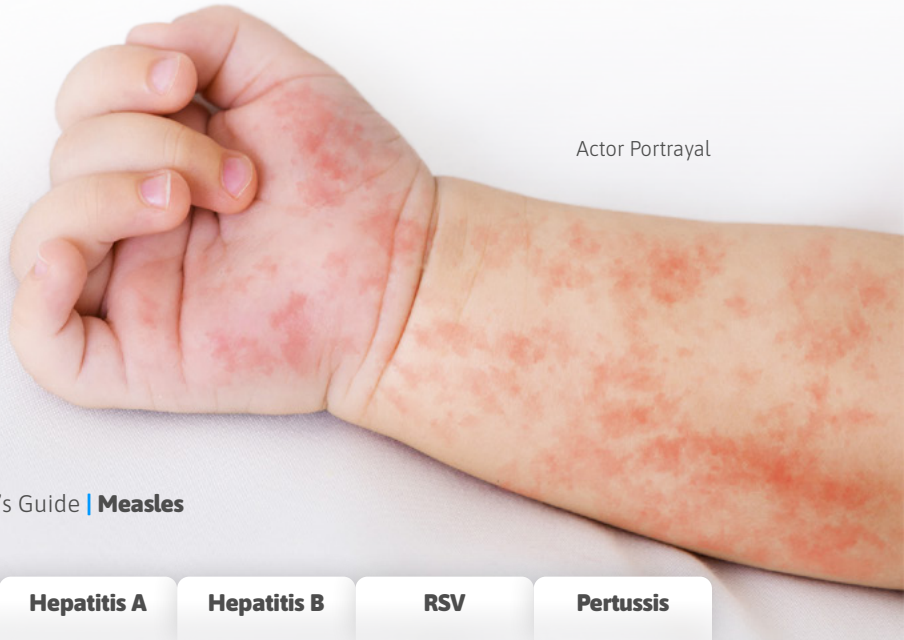

Actor Portrayal

What Is Invasive Pneumococcal Disease (IPD)?

The word "invasive" in invasive pneumococcal disease means the germ known as pneumococcus (noo-mo-ca-cus) has entered parts of the body that normally are free from germs.

How Common Is IPD?

IPD in children is twice as common in the first year of life than that of pediatric children 1 to 4 years of age combined. IPD is also more dangerous to infants and children under the age of two than to other pediatric age groups.

How Does IPD Spread?

Someone who is healthy or sick can spread pneumococcus to other people through coughing or sneezing.

Common Signs and Symptoms of IPD

- High fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Vomiting
- Chills
- Poor or decreased appetite and drinking
- Increased sleepiness and irritability/fussiness

Actor Portrayal

Potential Serious Infections of IPD

- Pneumococcal meningitis (men-in-jahy-tis), which is a serious infection of the coverings of the brain and spinal cord
- Pneumococcal bacteremia (bak-tuh-ree-mee-uh), which is an infection in the blood

Potential Complications of IPD

IPD can result in hospitalization. In rare cases, it can cause serious health complications, lifelong disabilities, or death.

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What Is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is a disease of the liver caused by the hepatitis A virus, which spreads when someone ingests it, usually through person-to-person contact or by consuming contaminated food or drink. Those infected may feel sick for a few weeks or several months.

How Common Is Hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is among the most common vaccine-preventable infections acquired during travel.

How Does Hepatitis A Spread?

Spreads through close contact with an infected person

Spreads through contaminated food or water

Signs and Symptoms of Hepatitis A

- Dark urine or clay-colored stools
- Feeling tired
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Joint pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Yellow skin or eyes (jaundice)

Not everyone with hepatitis A has symptoms. If symptoms develop, they usually appear 2 to 7 weeks after exposure.

Potential Risks and Complications

In rare cases, hepatitis A can cause liver failure and death.

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What Is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a disease of the liver that's transmitted when blood, semen, or another body fluid from a person infected with the hepatitis B virus enters the body of someone who is uninfected (eg, during sexual contact or childbirth). The disease can range from a mild, acute illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, long-term, chronic infection, which can occur later in life, often decades after exposure.

How Common Is Hepatitis B?

Reported cases of acute hepatitis B have been fluctuating around 2,100 cases per year from 2020 - 2022. In the US, during 2020, an estimated 880,000 people were chronically infected with hepatitis B.

Signs and Symptoms of Hepatitis B

- Dark urine or clay-colored stools
- Feeling tired
- Fever
- Joint pain
- Nausea, stomach pain, or vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Yellow skin or eyes (jaundice)

Many people infected with hepatitis B virus won't experience symptoms. If symptoms occur during acute infection, they often begin around 90 days after exposure.

Potential Risks and Complications

About 9 in 10 infants infected with hepatitis B ultimately develop a chronic infection, with the risk of chronic infection decreasing as the child gets older. Approximately 15% to 25% of people with chronic infection develop chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis, liver failure, or liver cancer.

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What Is Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)?

RSV is a common respiratory virus that infects the nose, throat, lungs, and breathing passages.

How Common Is RSV?

RSV is recognized as one of the most common causes of childhood illness. Previous RSV infection does not result in long-term immunity to the virus, so reinfections may occur.

Signs and Symptoms of RSV

RSV usually manifests with mild symptoms but can cause severe illness in infants.

Symptoms of RSV infection may include:

- Nasal congestion/runny nose
- Decreased appetite/eating and drinking less
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Fever
- Wheezing
- Difficulty breathing

Symptoms usually begin with mild congestion/runny nose, fever, cough, decreased feeding. After 2 to 3 days, some infants can experience worsening symptoms, including increased cough, wheezing, and/or rapid breathing.

How Is RSV spread?

RSV can survive for many hours on hard surfaces such as tables and crib rails. It typically lives on soft surfaces such as tissues and hands for shorter amounts of time.

An infant may catch RSV by:

- Getting virus droplets into the eyes, nose, or mouth from a cough or sneeze
- Having direct contact with the virus (eg, by a family member who has RSV kissing an infant's face)
- Touching a surface that has the virus on it and then touching their face before washing their hands

Potential Risks and Complications

As compared to older children, infants are more likely to develop severe RSV and need hospitalization. It is the leading cause of hospitalization in infants in the US and can lead to serious respiratory infections like bronchiolitis and pneumonia.

The highest rates of RSV-associated hospitalization in infants under the age of one occurred during the first few months of life, peaking at one month of age.

Are you prepared to talk with your child's doctor?

If you have questions about preventive options, have an open conversation with your health care provider.

Actor Portrayal

What Is Pertussis (Whooping Cough)?

Pertussis (whooping cough) is a respiratory illness caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. These bacteria damage the lining of the airway, leading to coughing fits and other symptoms.

How Common Is Whooping Cough?

Pertussis (whooping cough) is common in the US, with frequent outbreaks. Outbreaks can occur in many different settings including schools, daycare centers, and hospitals.

Signs and Symptoms of Whooping Cough

Whooping cough appears similar to a common cold early on.

Early symptoms (the first 1 to 2 weeks) can include:

- Runny or stuffed-up nose
- Low-grade fever (less than 100.4°F)
- Mild cough

Babies may struggle to breathe, have life-threatening pauses in breathing, or may turn blue.

Later symptoms (after 1 to 2 weeks) can include:

- Rapid, violent, uncontrolled coughing fits that usually last 1 to 6 weeks but can last for up to 10 weeks.
- Coughing fits can cause people to:
  - Make a high-pitched "whoop" when they inhale after a coughing fit
  - Vomit during or after coughing fits
  - Struggle to breathe
  - Fracture (break) a rib

Potential Risks and Complications

Whooping cough can cause serious and sometimes deadly complications in babies and young children. About 1 in 3 babies younger than 1 year old who get whooping cough need care in the hospital. The younger the baby, the more likely they'll need hospital treatment.

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