

Measles

What is Measles?

Measles, also known as red measles or rubeola is a very contagious viral infection that spreads through the air when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes. The virus can still be on surfaces and in the air up to 2 hours after that person has left the room. Since the measles vaccine became available in 1963 the number of cases of measles reported has declined. Measles is now considered a very uncommon infection in Canada.

What are the signs and symptoms of Measles?

Symptoms of measles include:

- fever, cough, runny nose
- drowsiness, irritability and red eyes
- white small spots can appear on the inside of the mouth and throat but not always present
- red blotchy rash can appear on the face, and then progress down the body

Symptoms begin anywhere from 7 to 21 days after a person has been exposed to the virus. Symptoms usually develop approximately 10 days after exposure and the rash usually appears 14 days after the exposure.

How is Measles spread?

Measles virus spreads easily through the air; it is spread by airborne droplets. Measles can spread from 4 days before the rash appears until 4 days after the onset of the rash.

What to do if you are exposed to Measles?

Any individual born before 1970, who had measles in the past, or who has received two doses of measles, would be considered protected against measles infection.

If you have been exposed and are not protected, a vaccine can prevent measles from developing if you receive it within 72 hours of exposure. You should contact your health care provider immediately.

Pregnant women who are not protected, individuals who have problems with their immune system, and are not protected, and infants under 6 months of age can be treated with another medication up to 6 days after exposure. These individuals should contact their health care provider.

If you develop symptoms:

- Call your health care provider if you are experiencing measles-like symptoms. If directed to visit your health care provider, upon arrival request a mask and ask to be seated in a private room.
- If your health care provider suspects measles they will notify the Health Unit at the phone number provide below.
- Stay home and do not have others visit for at least 4 days after the rash starts.
- If diagnosed with measles you should not return to school/daycare, work place, sporting events, health care and other group settings until 4 days after the appearance of the rash.

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How is Measles diagnosed and treated?

Measles is diagnosed by symptoms and laboratory tests including blood, urine, and throat test. There is no specific treatment for measles. Most people can recover at home. Supportive care in the hospital may be needed for severe infections. Immunization is the best protection.

How can Measles be prevented?

Immunization

- Two doses of measles vaccine are given to children after their first birthday to provide protection.
- Measles vaccine is given in combination with other vaccines.
- MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine should be administered at 12 months of age, and the second dose should be given as MMRV (measles, mumps, rubella, varicella) between four to six years of age.
- Some adults may have received only one dose of the vaccine in the past. A second dose of MMR is recommended for anyone born in 1970 or later.
- Measles vaccine should not be given to pregnant women or people with immune system problems.

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns.

**For further information contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.**