



Image Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Measles, also known as rubeola or red measles, is a very serious infection caused by a virus (germ). It spreads easily from person-to-person. It usually affects children, but anyone who is not vaccinated or has not had past infection can become infected with measles.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MEASLES?

- Measles often starts with a fever, cough, runny nose, and red eyes
- Small bluish white spots (Koplik's spots) may appear inside the mouth
- A red, blotchy rash may appear on the face and then the rest of the body 3 to 5 days later

Symptoms start 7 to 21 days (usually 10 days) after you have been near someone with measles.

The rash will begin to fade after about a week.

Symptoms often last 7 to 14 days.

WHAT ARE POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS OF MEASLES?

Common complications include diarrhea, ear infections, and pneumonia.

Rarely, measles can cause brain infections, and death.

HOW DOES MEASLES SPREAD?

Measles is very contagious and spreads easily from person-to-person through the air when a sick person coughs, sneezes, or breathes.

If you are not immune to measles (i.e., not vaccinated or have not had measles before), you can become sick just by being in the same room with someone who has measles or where someone with measles has been recently.

The virus stays in the air and on surfaces for up to 2 hours after the infected person leaves.

HOW LONG IS MEASLES CONTAGIOUS?

A person with measles can spread the virus from 4 days before the rash starts (and one day before the first symptoms appear) until 4 days after the rash appears.

WHAT IS THE RISK TO PREGNANT PEOPLE?

Pregnant people who catch measles are at risk for more severe complications of the illness, as well as increased risk for preterm labour and delivery.

continued...

(PAGE 2)

HOW IS MEASLES TREATED?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Talk to your health care provider about ways to relieve sore throat, cough, and fever.

HOW CAN MEASLES BE PREVENTED?

Know your immunization status. Immunization is the best way to prevent measles. People who are unsure of their vaccination history can still protect themselves with vaccines.

Two doses of measles-containing vaccine are routinely given in Ontario with the first dose at 12 months of age using measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine, and a second dose given at 4-6 years of age using measles, mumps, rubella, varicella (MMRV) vaccine which contains additional protection against varicella (chicken pox).

One dose of vaccine provides up to 85-95% protection against measles, and 2 doses provides up to 99% protection if given as a childhood series. Adults born before 1970 can be presumed to have acquired natural protection (immunity) to measles. Adults who do not know their vaccination history, should talk to their health care provider about getting a dose of MMR vaccine for protection.

Health care workers, and military personnel, require documentation of vaccination with 2 doses of measles-containing vaccine or laboratory evidence of immunity, regardless of year of birth.

All travellers to destinations outside of Canada should speak with their health care provider about receiving a dose of MMR if they have not received 2 doses. Infants 6 to 11 months of age travelling outside of Canada (or to areas experiencing outbreaks) may receive one dose of MMR. They will still need to receive 2 additional doses after their first birthday. To ensure 2 doses of MMR before travel, children under 4 years of age who have received 1 dose should be considered for an early second dose of MMR.

Pregnant people should not be given measles-containing vaccine. Individuals who are immunocompromised should consult their health care provider or a physician with expertise in immunodeficiency before receiving a live vaccine.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE EXPOSED TO MEASLES

If you have been around someone with measles, call your health care provider right away.

Let them know you have been in contact with someone with measles.

Your health care provider will:

- Ask you to wear a mask when you are in the office
- Find out if you are immune to measles based on your vaccination record, age, or by doing a blood test
- Offer to vaccinate you if you are not immune to measles and it is within 72 hours of exposure. This will help lower your risk of getting measles.

IMPORTANT

If you are not immune to measles OR your healthcare provider thinks that you have measles, you should stay home and self-isolate from all public places until your health care provider says you can stop isolating OR until 4 days after the rash appeared.

REFERENCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Epidemiology and prevention of vaccine-preventable diseases. 14th ed. Washington, DC: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/meas.html>

Canadian Paediatric Society. Measles [Internet]. Ottawa: Canadian Paediatric Society; 2015. <https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/measles>

Heymann DL. Control of Communicable Diseases Manual. 20th ed. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association; 2015.

World Health Organization. Measles [Internet]. Geneva: WHO; 2023. (Updated Aug 2023) <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/measles>

Canadian Immunization Guide. Measles Vaccine. [Internet]. 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/publichealth/services/publications/healthy-living/canadian-immunization-guide-part-4-active-vaccines/page-12-measles-vaccine.html>