

# Measles General Information

## What is measles?

Measles, also known as Red Measles or Rubeola, is a vaccine preventable respiratory disease caused by a virus. It is spread extremely easily through the air when someone with measles coughs or sneezes, and by direct contact with infected nose or throat secretions. Measles virus can survive up to two hours in the air even after the contagious person has left the space. Measles is the most highly communicable of all infectious diseases. In Canada, measles is extremely rare due to vaccine programs and typically is associated with travel to places where measles is more common.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms start about 7–21 days after a person is infected with the virus and can include:

- fever
- runny nose
- red watery eyes, often sensitive to light
- conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- cough
- small, white spots may appear on the inside of the mouth (Koplik spots)
- red, blotchy rash that starts on the face and neck and then spreads outward to the arms and legs.

Measles usually starts with a fever, cough, runny nose, and red, puffy, watery eyes. Small white spots may be seen in the mouth. About 3-7 days after symptoms begin, a red rash appears on the face and head, and then spreads over the rest of the body.

## What are the complications?

- Most people recover from measles within 2 – 3 weeks.
- Risk of severe outcomes are increased in children less than 5 years of age, pregnant women, and immunocompromised children.
  - Complications can include ear infections, pneumonia, encephalitis (swelling or inflammation of the brain), seizures, deafness, as well as premature labor, miscarriage, and low birth weight if contracted during pregnancy.
- Death can occur, although it is extremely rare.

## What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Treatment and follow-up are under the direction of the attending health care provider.

## How can you prevent measles?

- Avoid contact with someone who has measles if you have not had measles or are not fully vaccinated. Measles can be spread to others from 4 days before to 4 days after the start of the rash.
- Ensure vaccines are up to date. Measles-containing vaccines are safe and the most effective way to protect against measles infection.
- In Nova Scotia, measles vaccine eligibility is found: [Nova Scotia Vaccine Immunoglobulin eligibility.pdf \(novascotia.ca\)](#), and includes:
  - Children should receive measles-containing vaccines at 12 months of age and again at 18 months of age, given as measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (MMRV) vaccine.
  - Everyone born in 1970 or after should have 2 doses of measles vaccine.
  - Adult born before 1970 without immunity travelling to regions where measles is endemic or there is substantial community-based transmission during an outbreak – 1 dose of measles containing vaccine.
  - Children 6 months to less than 12 months of age travelling to regions where measles is endemic or there is substantial community-based transmission during an outbreak – 1 dose of measles containing vaccine.
- Sometimes measles-containing vaccine or immunoglobulin is given to people who have been in contact with a person with measles. If the vaccine is given early enough, it may prevent the person from getting the disease. If you have been in contact with someone you know has measles, call your doctor or Public Health right away. If you suspect that you have measles, advise your doctor or healthcare provider before you visit their office.
- Other general infection protection measures which are helpful to protect against many infectious diseases include:
  - Wash your hands often or use hand sanitizer
  - Do not share drinking glasses or eating utensils
  - Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your elbow
  - Stay home when you are sick

## What should I do if I think I have measles?

Limit contact with others until you speak with a healthcare provider.

Do not go to school, work, or any public places. Do not take part in social activities. Stay home from work, school, public places, and other social settings.

Practice prevention steps listed above.

If you suspect you have measles, contact your health care provider before you book your appointment to allow the office to prepare appropriately for your arrival.

## Useful websites

- Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion: [immunize.ca](https://immunize.ca)
- Public Health Agency of Canada:
  - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html>
  - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/measles/health-professionals-measles.html>
- Canadian Paediatric Society [Measles | Caring for kids \(cps.ca\)](https://cps.ca)