

Measles General Information

What is measles?

Measles, also known as Red Measles or Rubeola, is a serious disease caused by a virus. It is spread easily through the air when someone with measles coughs or sneezes, and by direct contact with infected nose or throat secretions.

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

Measles usually starts with a fever, cough, runny nose, and red, puffy, watery eyes. Small white spots may be seen in the mouth. A few days later, 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.
- Serious complications can include ear infections, pneumonia, encephalitis (swelling or inflammation of the brain), seizures, and deafness as well as premature labour, miscarriage, and low birth weight if contracted during pregnancy.
- Death can occur, although it is rare.

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Supportive care is provided as needed.

Avoid close contact with others until the end of the 4th day after the rash appears. The illness can be spread to others from 4 days before to 4 days after the start of the rash.

Sometimes the measles vaccine 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.

How can you prevent measles?

- Ensure vaccines are up to date. In Nova Scotia, children should receive measles vaccines at 12 months of age and again at 18 months of age. Everyone born in 1970 or after should have 2 doses of measles vaccine.
- Avoid contact with someone who has measles if you have not had measles or are not fully vaccinated.
- 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.
- Contact your local public health office or health care provider if you have been in contact with someone with measles – They may recommend getting the measles vaccine or immunoglobulin to prevent getting measles.

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.

Useful websites

- Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion: 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: cps.ca