

Measles



What is measles?

Measles is a very contagious respiratory infection that is caused by a virus. The symptoms include fever, a red skin rash, red and watery eyes, cough and a runny nose. Although most people recover fully from measles within two to three weeks, it can be serious or, very rarely, even deadly. Almost everyone who has not been vaccinated or who hasn't already had measles will get it if they are exposed to the virus.

How is measles spread?

The virus spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People can catch it by:

- breathing the air where an infected person has coughed or sneezed
- touching an infected surface, and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth
- being in a room where a person with measles is or has been, even up to two hours after that person has left the room

People who have measles can spread it to others up to four days *before* they get a rash and up to four days *after* they get a rash.

Prevention

You can protect your children against measles with a safe and effective vaccine. For the best protection, children should receive the two recommended doses of the measles vaccine. The vaccine is given at:

- one year of age
- four to six years of age



Is it serious?

Measles can be dangerous, especially for babies under 12 months of age. Complications happen in up to 10 per cent of measles cases, and can include:

- pneumonia (an infection in the lungs)
- encephalitis (an infection in the brain), which can cause seizures, brain damage or even death
- otitis media (an ear infection)

Measles may cause pregnant women to give birth early, or have a baby with a low birth weight.

Even if only one person has measles,

9 in 10

people who are around them will become infected if they are not protected by the vaccine or have never had the disease



Symptoms

Symptoms of measles usually appear about 10 days after a person is exposed to the virus. They include:

- fever, cough, a runny nose, and red and watery eyes
- a blotchy red rash that starts on the face and spreads to the rest of the body
- small white spots inside the mouth and throat
- sleepiness
- irritability (feeling crabby or in a bad mood)

What are the risks?

Measles is still a common disease in many parts of the world, including Europe, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Anyone who is not protected by vaccination, or has not had measles already, is at risk of getting infected if they travel to these areas. Even travelling through international airports, including those in Canada, can put you at a higher risk of getting measles.

Measles can also be brought into Ontario by travellers who aren't vaccinated. They can then spread it to people who are not protected by vaccination.

Stay up to date with your vaccinations

If there is a measles outbreak in your community and you are not fully vaccinated, you are at risk! If you have symptoms, contact your health care provider as soon as possible. It is very important to identify measles early, to prevent it from spreading.

The vaccines are part of the publicly funded vaccine schedule and are offered free to all children in Ontario. The measles vaccine is required for children to attend school in Ontario and for children attending a daycare centre, unless they have a valid exemption.

Vaccination is also publicly funded for adults, if they have never had measles or been vaccinated.

Anyone who is not protected is at risk of getting measles. Talk to your health care provider before you travel. For more information on travel health and safety, please visit the Government of Canada website travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety.



It takes all of us to protect each of us.

Talk to your health care provider or your local public health unit about the measles vaccine.