

MEASLES

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease and is sometimes called “hard measles” or “red measles” because of the presence of a red rash.

Most people recover completely from measles, but the infection can cause complications such as ear infections, lung infections (pneumonia), inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) and death. If a pregnant woman gets measles, she may be at higher risk of having a miscarriage or premature delivery.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms may include:

- Cough
- Runny nose (coryza)
- Fever
- Red watery eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Sensitivity to light
- White spots in the mouth (Koplik spots)

A red, blotchy rash appears from the third to the seventh day, beginning at the hairline and spreading down the body to the arms and legs. The rash disappears in the same order of appearance (head to foot) in about four to seven days. On average, the illness lasts for about 10 days. The disease is more severe in pregnant women, in the very young, and among people with weakened immune systems.

How does measles spread?

Measles is one of the most contagious infectious diseases. Measles spreads easily from person to person through droplets from the mouth, nose and throat of an infected person. These airborne droplets spread through talking, coughing or sneezing.

Although less common, the virus can also spread through contact with items (such as tissues) that have been freshly soiled with nose and throat discharges.

A person with measles can spread the virus from four days before until four days after the rash has appeared.

How long does it take to become ill after exposure to the measles?

Symptoms usually appear about 10 days after exposure, but it may take seven to 21 days until the onset of fever and usually 14 days until a rash appears after exposure.

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How do I know that I have measles?

Measles is diagnosed by common signs and symptoms combined with laboratory tests.

Because measles is so contagious, call your doctor's office before visiting so your doctor can arrange your visit to prevent exposure to others in the waiting room.

How is measles treated?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Most people recover at home but care in hospital may be needed for severe infections.

How can measles be prevented?

Vaccination is the best protection against measles. The Ontario Immunization schedule indicates two doses of measles containing vaccine received after first birthday is recommended for protective response.

Who should get measles vaccine?

Anyone born in 1970 or later should receive two doses of measles containing vaccine (MMR and MMRV). Children are usually given the first MMR vaccine at 12 months of age and the second as MMRV between four and six years of age. Anyone seven years of age and older should have received two doses of MMR separated by at least 28 days. Parents travelling outside of Canada with infants under 12 months of age should consult their physician.

It is generally assumed that adults born before 1970 were infected as children and have acquired natural immunity to measles. However, if you are attending a post-secondary institution or travelling, you should receive one dose of MMR.

Regardless of age, health care workers and military recruits should have two doses of MMR.

Pregnant individuals and individuals with a weakened immune system should not be vaccinated with measles vaccine.

Can I still go to school or work if I am infected?

A person with measles should stay home from school, work, or daycare and should not participate in any other activities outside the home until the fifth day after the rash appears.

What can I do if I come in contact with someone with measles?

Notify your health care provider of your measles exposure and confirm your immunization status as soon as possible. Your health care provider may recommend an MMR vaccination or immunoglobulin (blood product) to decrease your risk of developing measles.

If you have never been vaccinated, an MMR vaccine is recommended within 72 hours of being in contact with a person with measles infection.

Infants under 12 months, pregnant individuals and individuals with a weakened immune system can receive an immunoglobulin injection within six days of contracting measles. Immunoglobulin contains antibodies that can reduce the risk of becoming infected with measles.

Continue to monitor for symptoms for 21 days after your last exposure. If you develop symptoms of measles, please notify your health care provider immediately by phone before visiting their clinic.