

## Measles Fact Sheet

***This fact sheet was created March 25, 2025 and provides basic information based on the Government of Canada recommendations at the time of writing. Please see the references at the end of the fact sheet for details.***

***The information provided in this fact sheet is general information and not intended to replace the advice of your primary health care provider and local public health unit.***

***If you have questions after reading this fact sheet, please contact your primary health care provider, local public health unit, or call 811. Many individuals and families have unique circumstances that are not covered by the information in this fact sheet.***

In December 2023 the World Health Organization (WHO) alerted countries about measles after a 30-fold rise in cases across Europe since 2022. Recently measles outbreaks have been reported in Ontario and in Canada. Rising global measles activity, reduced vaccination rates, and increased international travel are thought to be linked with the recent measles outbreaks.

### What is measles?

Measles is a respiratory virus that is easily spread from person to person and through the air. People who are infected with measles can spread it to other people before they realize that they have a measles infection. The measles virus can live for up to 2 hours in the air. Measles can be spread from four days before the rash appears until four days after the onset of the rash.

### What are the symptoms of measles?

Early symptoms are a fever, cough, runny nose and red, watery eyes. Early symptoms usually appear 7 to 21 days after being infected. Then, about 3 to 7 days later, the infected person develops a rash that looks like red spots and blotchy patches that start on the face and spread down the body, arms and legs. This rash can last 4 to 7 days. The rash may be harder to see in people with darker skin tones or the spots may appear purple or darker than the surrounding skin. Most people recover from measles within 2 or 3 weeks.



## Are there any health complications from measles?

Anyone with measles infection can develop complications from the infection. Measles complications can range from mild to life-threatening, Ear infections, diarrhea, pneumonia and more severe complications such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), blindness and death have been reported.



People at higher risk of developing severe complications include:

- children under 5 years of age, especially infants who are too young to be vaccinated
- unvaccinated or under-vaccinated people who are pregnant
- people with weakened immune systems

## Who is at risk of getting measles?

People who are exposed to the measles virus and are not immune have over a 90% likelihood of becoming infected. If you were born before 1970, have had measles in the past, or have received two documented doses of measles-containing vaccine you are considered protected against measles infection.

## How can measles be prevented?



Measles can be prevented with vaccination. The measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine and/or the measles-mumps-rubella-varicella (MMRV) vaccine are routinely given in childhood.

The first dose is recommended after the first birthday at 12 to 15 months of age. A second dose is given at either 18 months of age or any time thereafter, but no later than around school entry. Two doses provide lifelong immunity for most people.

Ontario has publicly funded immunization schedules for infants, children and adults. The MMR vaccine is recommended at or after one year of age and the MMRV vaccine at 4 to 6 years of age. Catch-up schedules for missed vaccines are also available. Talk to your health care provider or local health unit for details.

Some adults may have received only one dose of the vaccine in the past. A second dose of the vaccine is recommended for anyone born in 1970 or later.

Measles vaccine should not be given to pregnant individuals or people with immune system problems. Pregnant individuals who need the vaccine should wait until after giving birth to get vaccinated.

## How can I find out if I have been vaccinated for measles?

Check your immunization record or contact your primary health care provider or public health unit to see if they have documentation of your vaccination for measles.

## What should I do if I think I have been exposed to measles?

In February 2025 Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization's (NACI) updated their recommendations for people who are not expected to have immunity and are exposed to measles. Factors such as year of birth, past vaccination and infection history, and documented laboratory evidence of measles infection or immunity are considered in the decision-making.

If you have been exposed and are not protected, a vaccine can prevent measles from developing if given within 72 hours of exposure. Contact your primary health care provider or public health unit for more information.

Pregnant individuals who are not protected, individuals who have problems with their immune system and are not protected, and infants under 6 months of age can be treated with another medication up to 6 days after exposure. Be sure to contact your health care provider and your public health unit right away.

In Canada it's safe for breastfeeding women to receive the MMR vaccine. It's recommended for those who are not immune to measles to protect themselves with vaccination.

## Does breastfeeding protect my baby from measles?

Breastfeeding provides infants with passive immunity against various infections, including measles. During pregnancy, mothers transfer Immunoglobulin G (IgG) antibodies to the baby through the placenta, offering initial protection. After birth, breastfeeding continues to support the infant's immune system by supplying Immunoglobulin A (IgA) antibodies.



Babies who are breastfeeding should still receive vaccination for measles at the recommended time. Breastfeeding helps the baby's immune defense against measles but does not replace the important protection provided by vaccination.

## There is a measles outbreak in my community. How can I lessen my baby's risk of measles infection?



**Practice careful hand hygiene.** Thoroughly wash your hands using soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Remind others in your home or anyone who is near your baby to do the same.

**Limit your baby's exposure** to crowds, other children, and anyone with symptoms that could be measles.

**Disinfect** objects and surfaces in your home regularly.

**Breastfeed or feed your baby breastmilk.**

## What should I do if I think that someone in my family has measles?



**Isolate the person at home** and call your health care provider immediately. Do not go to a health care facility such as your doctor's office or a walk-in clinic without calling ahead to let them know that you might have measles. They will want to take precautions to lessen the risk of spreading the measles virus to others.

**Wearing a mask** can lessen the risk of spreading the measles virus to other family members.

**Avoid exposing others to infection** by staying home and not allowing others to visit for at least four days after the start of the rash.

## References

Government of Canada. (2024 June 07) Measles: What you should Know (Fact Sheet ) [Measles: What you should know \(factsheet\) - Canada.ca](#) Retrieved March 25, 2025.

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