

# Measles Fact Sheet

## What is measles?

Measles is a very contagious disease caused by a virus. People can develop measles 7 to 21 days after being exposed. Symptoms include:

- High fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes
- Small, white spots inside the mouth
- Red, blotchy rash
- Sleepiness
- Irritability

While these symptoms are common among many viral illnesses, measles infections are rare and usually occur in isolated outbreaks.

Measles complications may include pneumonia, ear infections, blindness, inflammation of the brain, death, and premature labour and low-birth weight for pregnant individuals.

## How does measles spread?

- Measles spreads very easily through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes
- The measles virus can live for up to 2 hours in the air or on surfaces after an infected person leaves a space
- An infected person can spread measles virus to others starting 4 days before rash appears until 4 days after
- It is important for measles cases to self-isolate during this period to avoid spreading the infection to others

## Who is at risk?

Any person who is unvaccinated, has not received all recommended doses of measles vaccine, or has no history of measles infection is susceptible and at risk of becoming infected.

Individuals at greatest risk of measles complications include:

- Susceptible babies and children under 5 years of age
- Susceptible pregnant people
- Susceptible adults over 20 years of age
- Malnourished children
- People with weak immune systems (e.g., cancer, transplant recipient, living with HIV infection)

Individuals at higher risk of being exposed to measles include:

- Travelers
- Healthcare workers
- Students, including those attending post-secondary or daycare
- Military personnel

In Canada, adults born before 1970 are presumed to have developed natural immunity to measles. However, some of these individuals may still be at risk, contact your health care provider for more information.



## Is there treatment for measles?

- There is no specific treatment for measles infection
- Severe complications can be prevented through supportive care including fever management, good nutrition and fluid intake
- Close contacts to a measles case may be recommended to receive measles-containing vaccine or a preventative treatment called immunoglobulin, which reduces their risk of infection

## When should I contact a health care provider?

Contact a health care provider if you or those you are caring for:

- Are not starting to feel better in a few days
- Have symptoms that are getting worse (i.e., high fever, sleepiness)
- Are not eating or drinking well

## What can I do to protect myself and others?

- All community members are strongly encouraged to make sure measles vaccinations are up to date for themselves and their family members
- Measles vaccination is a safe and effective way to protect against measles infection
- Additional illness prevention measures include:
  - Watching for signs of illness and staying home if you are sick
  - Washing your hands often with soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand rub
  - Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when coughing or sneezing
  - Cleaning high-touch surfaces often (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, phones, TV remotes)
  - Not sharing personal items (e.g., cups, water bottles, toothbrushes, eating utensils)

If you have symptoms of measles or have been told you have measles:

- Self-isolate at home until 4 days after rash onset, with date of rash onset being day 0
- Avoid contact with non-household contacts and do not have visitors
- Avoid contact with high-risk individuals (i.e., babies, pregnant people, immunocompromised people)
- Do not attend public settings, including but not limited to:
  - Childcare settings
  - Schools
  - Post-secondary educational institutions
  - Workplaces
  - Cultural ceremonies and events
  - Places of worship
  - Sporting events
  - Health care
  - Other group settings
- If you need medical care, call your health care provider or health facilities (e.g., nursing station, health centre, hospital) before you arrive to notify them of your measles diagnosis, symptoms or exposure; this helps prevent the spread of infection
  - If urgent assessment is needed and you cannot call ahead, triage should be alerted immediately

**Contact your health care provider, community health nurse or local public health unit for more information about measles and measles vaccination.**

