



What is Measles?

Measles is a highly contagious viral infection, and usually lasts about two weeks. It can be complicated by ear infections or pneumonia in one out of every 10 children. Measles can also be complicated by encephalitis, an infection of the brain, in about one out of every 1,000 children.

Measles causes death in about one in 3,000 cases. Measles may cause a pregnant woman to have a miscarriage or to give birth prematurely.

The disease is more severe in infants and adults over 20 years of age.

Before measles vaccine was used widely, almost all children got measles. Now, because of the routine use of vaccine, very few children get measles in Canada.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms of measles include:

- fever
- cough and runny nose
- red and irritated eyes
- a red, blotchy rash that starts on the head and face then spreads to the rest of the body

How is measles spread?

Measles virus is airborne and spreads very easily from person to person. It is passed from an infected person to others through coughing, sneezing and even talking. It can stay in the air up to two hours after a known case of measles has left the room.

Once you come into contact with measles, it takes on average about 14 days for the rash to develop, but may be as long as 21 days. A person with measles is able to spread infection from 4 days before to 4 days after the onset of rash.

What should I do if I think that my child has, or I have measles?

If you suspect that you or your child has measles, contact a health care provider. Call ahead and let the health care provider know you are coming and that you suspect measles. The health care provider can then take precautions in their office. Other viruses can cause symptoms that are similar to measles. The health care provider can order tests to confirm the diagnosis through blood, nasopharyngeal, throat and/or urine samples.

Is there a treatment for measles?

There is no treatment for this viral illness other than supportive care.

Un-immunized persons more than 12 months of age, or persons who have received only one dose of measles-containing vaccine and who have been exposed to measles, may be protected from measles if they receive a dose of the measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine within 72 hours from exposure.

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If I had measles as a child, can I get measles again?

If you had measles as a child you are likely immune.

Measles can be prevented with immunization. Measles vaccine is given in the same shot with mumps and rubella. This combined vaccine is called the MMR vaccine. The MMR vaccine is part of the routine vaccinations available free to all children in Ontario. The first dose of MMR vaccine is given at 12 months of age and a second dose is now given at 18 months of age. Before 2005, the second dose of MMR was given at 4 to 6 years of age. All children in Ontario require two doses of measles-containing vaccine to attend school.

Adults who have not had MMR vaccine can be vaccinated as well. In general, adults born before 1970 are likely protected from childhood infection with measles. However, as extra protection, adults likely to be exposed to measles who have never been vaccinated can receive a dose of MMR vaccine. People traveling to areas where measles outbreaks are occurring should follow the recommendations for that area regarding the need for a second dose of measles vaccine.

Is the MMR vaccine safe?

Yes, the MMR vaccine is very safe and effective. Most children will have no reaction. MMR vaccine can cause a rash or fever in some children five to 12 days after the needle. This may last for a few days. Occasionally, a high fever can cause a convulsion. The convulsion comes from the high fever caused by the vaccine rather than the vaccine itself. Allergic reactions to the MMR vaccine are very rare.

People who have serious problems with their immune system should not receive the MMR vaccine. As well, women should not be vaccinated if they are pregnant and should not become pregnant within one month after getting the MMR vaccine. The vaccine is safe for household members of people with serious immune system problems and household members of pregnant women. Breastfeeding women can receive the MMR vaccine.

Where can I get the MMR vaccine?

The MMR vaccine is publicly funded and available at your health care provider's office or through Hastings Prince Edward Public Health immunization clinics.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

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- Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care, Infectious Disease Protocol, 2009.
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