



Reduce the Risk of Getting or Spreading Measles

There are outbreaks of measles happening in some communities in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, as well as increases in measles activity globally. With the increased activity of measles, people are encouraged to stay informed of outbreaks and exposures within their community, and any communities they may visit within Canada or internationally.

Vaccination against measles helps to protect individuals and their families. Those who are vaccinated do not continue to spread measles, which can also help protect those at risk of severe health complications and contributes to the health and safety of the whole community.

About measles and how it spreads

Measles is a viral illness that causes respiratory symptoms and a rash. 90% of people who come into contact with the virus will become infected if they don't have immunity from vaccination or previous infection. Although most people with measles recover without any issues after a few weeks, some individuals, such as pregnant women, babies and children under five years of age, and people with weakened immune systems are at risk of developing severe health complications. These can include respiratory failure, brain swelling, deafness and death.

The measles virus can stay in the air or on surfaces for up to two hours. Individuals can get measles by breathing in air that has the virus in it, or by touching something that has the virus on it, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Preventing measles

Measles can be prevented with routine vaccinations, which typically begins at 12 months of age. If you or your child missed a vaccine, you can still catch up.

Having 2 doses of a measles-containing vaccine is almost 100% effective at preventing measles. Two doses of measles-containing vaccine are recommended for children, adolescents and some adults. Check with your health care provider or local public health department about measles vaccination recommendations in your province or territory. If you plan to travel outside of Canada, talk to a health care provider or local public health department preferably 6 weeks before travel to see if you are up to date with your vaccinations or need additional doses of a measles-containing vaccine.

Taking Vitamin A does not prevent measles. However, a doctor may prescribe a few doses of Vitamin A to someone with measles to prevent complications related to Vitamin A deficiency. Taking vitamin A in large doses or over a prolonged period of time can cause serious toxicity or poisoning.

What to do if exposed

People who are not immune to measles and have recently interacted with someone who has measles, or attended a gathering such as a religious service where the virus is circulating, should monitor themselves for symptoms, limiting contact with others, and avoiding any travel for the next three weeks (21 days). This will help prevent transmission and protect everyone from measles infection, especially those at risk of severe health complications.

What to do if symptoms develop

Symptoms of measles usually begin with a fever, cough, runny nose, and red watery eyes. After a few days, a red blotchy rash may appear on the face and spread down the body. A person with measles can infect others from four days before until four days after the rash appears.

If someone in the household does develop symptoms, it is important that all household members limit contact with others. The person with measles symptoms should remain at home until four days after the appearance of a rash. All other household members should remain at home and monitor for symptoms for three weeks (21 days), or until four days after the appearance of a rash, if one develops. Ensuring everyone in the household stays home and does not receive any visitors will help protect others from measles. People at risk of severe complications from measles should not be a caregiver to someone who has measles, unless they know they are immune from previous measles vaccination or infection.

Seeking emergency care for severe symptoms

Severe symptoms are a medical emergency and seeking care should not be delayed. This can include difficulty breathing or breathing very fast, confusion, difficulty waking up, and signs of dehydration such as urinating less often, dry nose and mouth, and lack of tears.

It is important that the hospital or clinic be notified that someone who may have measles is on the way. This will allow staff to take appropriate actions to protect themselves and other patients from the measles virus.

Public transportation should be avoided, if possible, when seeking medical care. Masks are encouraged if the person with measles has to take transportation with someone outside their household.

For more information visit Canada.ca/measles.