

MEASLES (red measles or rubeola)

What is measles?

Measles (red measles or rubeola) is a disease caused by the measles virus. It is not the same as Rubella (German measles).

There has been a large decline in the numbers of measles infection in countries where vaccine has been widely used, however measles remains a serious and common disease in many parts of the world. Over the past five years, there has been an average of ten measles cases each year in Canada. Between 2002-2011, we had 2 cases of measles reported in the province.

What are the symptoms?

Initial symptoms, which usually appear eight to 12 days after infection, include high fever, runny nose, cough, sore eyes, and tiny white spots on the inside of the mouth. A red blotchy rash appears on the face and then on the rest of the body.

Measles can cause ear infections or pneumonia (a serious infection of the lung). Swelling of the brain (encephalitis) occurs in one child out of 1000. This can lead to fits (seizures), deafness, mental retardation or death.

Most people are sick for up to ten days and then recover completely. It is important to see your health-care provider if you have symptoms of measles.

How is measles spread?

Measles is spread through close contact with an infected person. This highly contagious virus can be found in the air after someone who is infected with measles coughs or sneezes, the virus can then be inhaled. The virus can also be spread by direct contact with infected secretions of the nose and throat through sharing food, drinks, cigarettes or kissing someone who has the virus. The virus can remain contagious on surfaces for up to two hours. A person can spread measles from four days before to four days after the rash develops.

How is measles diagnosed?

Measles is diagnosed by a history of exposure to someone who has the disease, symptoms, and laboratory testing.

Measles is suspected when a person feels unwell, has a cough, runny nose or sore eyes and a fever followed by a rash. Whenever measles is suspected, a blood test and samples from the nose, throat and urine should be collected to confirm the diagnosis. Confirmation of the diagnosis is important as it allows prompt public health follow-up of other people who are at risk of getting measles.

Who is at risk of infection?

Once someone has had measles they are considered protected for life. Most individuals born before 1970 likely had measles as a child and are considered to be immune. Anyone born after 1970 who has not had two doses of measles vaccine and has never had measles is at risk.

How can measles be prevented?

The best way to protect against measles is to be immunized. New Brunswick children are routinely immunized with two doses of the MMR vaccine at 12 and 18 months old. Infants and children born in 1995 or later and adults born in 1970 or later who have not previously received two doses of MMR vaccine should contact their health care provider to be immunized.

Adults born in 1970 or later who have not had measles infection and have not had two doses of measles vaccine are eligible to receive publicly funded MMR vaccine.

If anyone that has not been immunized is in close contact with someone who has measles they should consult a health-care provider.

Consult your health care provider or a travel clinic before you or your loved ones travel to ensure you are up to date with your immunization. This includes pre-arranged tours.

Persons with measles should not attend childcare centres, school, or work for four days after the rash appears. Covering nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, disposing soiled tissues, washing hands well and not sharing eating utensils, food or drinking cups will also help to reduce the spread of infection.

How is measles treated?

There is no specific treatment for measles. Symptoms such as fever and headache may be treated with acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®) . Drink plenty of fluids such as water, juice and soup and get plenty rest. Supportive care in hospital may be needed for severe infections, but most people can recover at home. If measles is suspected, it is important to call ahead before going to your health centre so precautions can be taken to ensure that the infection is not passed to others.

ASA or Aspirin® should NOT be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye 's syndrome with some virus infections.

What is the public health response?

Health-care providers, hospitals and laboratories, schools and childcare centres must immediately notify cases of measles to Public Health. Public health staff will interview the health-care provider and patient (or care-givers) to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people at risk of infection, implement control measures (such as immunization and restrictions on attending school or work) and provide other advice.

Further Information

For additional information, contact your health-care provider, local [Public Health office](#) or Tele-Care 811.

Useful websites:

Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion <http://www.immunize.cpha.ca>

Public Health Agency of Canada <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>

Canadian Pediatric Society <http://www.cps.ca>