

Measles

Public Health – Factsheet

This document is to be used in conjunction with the measles-containing vaccine factsheets (MMR or MMRV Vaccine Factsheets).

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious viral infection that is caused by the measles virus.

Symptoms develop 7-21 days after being exposed to the virus. Initial symptoms include a high fever (38.5 C or higher), red eyes, runny nose, and/or cough. A red blotchy rash often appears 3-7 days after the initial symptoms start. The rash usually begins on the face and spreads down the body. Small white spots may also develop on the inside of the mouth or throat.

Some people can develop ear infections and lung infections (pneumonia) after a measles infection. The most serious complication of measles is a brain infection (encephalitis). This can lead to seizures, hearing loss, brain damage or death. Measles can be more severe in infants, people with a weakened immune system and pregnant people. Measles infection in pregnancy can also lead to miscarriages or premature births.

There is no cure for measles. Current treatment focuses on relieving the symptoms.

How is measles spread?

The measles virus spreads from the infected person to others through the air, or through contact with fluids in the nose or throat by coughing, sneezing, or by sharing food or drinks. Children may become infected by sharing soothers, bottles, or toys that have been in contact with other infected children.

An infected person is contagious and able to spread the virus to others from four days before the rash appears, until four days after.

If you think you or your child may have measles, it is important to avoid contact with others. Stay home from work, school, or childcare centres. Contact your primary care provider for assessment. It is important to tell your primary

care provider that you or your child may have measles BEFORE you visit their office. Wearing a medical mask can also help to prevent exposures to others.

If you or your child have been diagnosed with measles or have been in close contact with someone that has measles, call your local public health office or Health Links – Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 (toll-free) for more information.

Prevention

Immunization is the best way to protect you and your children against measles. There are two kinds of measles-containing vaccines approved by Health Canada. The MMR vaccine protects against measles, mumps and rubella. The MMRV vaccine protects against measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox (varicella). When you and your child are immunized, you also help protect others because someone who is immunized generally does not develop the disease to spread the infection.

Other precautions you can take include:

- Avoid sharing personal items such as water bottles, lip gloss and cigarettes.
- Cover your nose and mouth with your forearm or tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, clean them with alcohol-based sanitizer.

Who should get a measles-containing vaccine?

The following eligible people can receive an MMR or MMRV vaccine free of charge:

- All children 12 months and older can receive two doses of the MMRV vaccine.

- All infants 6 months to less than 12 months can receive a dose of MMR vaccine if they are travelling to a country with measles transmission.
- All adults born in or after 1985 can receive two doses of the MMR vaccine.
- Non-immune adults born between 1970 and 1984 can receive one dose of an MMR vaccine.
- Non-immune healthcare workers can receive two doses of the MMR vaccine.
- Non-immune students born before 1970 can receive one dose of the MMR vaccine. Non-immune students born after 1970 can receive two doses.

People born before 1970 are considered immune because they were likely exposed to the measles virus growing up.

Please visit Manitoba's Eligibility Criteria for Publicly Funded Vaccines (www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/vaccineeligibility.html) for more information on who is eligible for vaccines.

Non-immune close contacts to a case of measles can also receive a measles-containing vaccine free-of-charge. Providing the vaccine as soon as possible (within 3 days from exposure) can help to prevent the development of measles disease.

Who should NOT get a measles-containing vaccine?

If the person receiving the vaccine has any of the following, (s)he should talk to his/her health care provider:

- has had a severe allergic reaction after receiving a previous dose of this vaccine or any contents of the vaccine
- is pregnant
- has a congenital or acquired immunodeficiency disorder (such as HIV, stem cell transplant)
- is being treated with drugs that affect the immune system, such as steroids
- has any kind of cancer or is being treated for cancer with radiation or drugs

Someone with a high fever should not be immunized. The vaccine can still be given if the illness is mild, such as having a common cold.

Individuals should avoid pregnancy for at least one month after they get the MMR vaccine.

Possible side-effects of the measles-containing vaccines

Vaccines are known to be very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get measles. Adverse events following immunization with measles-containing vaccines occur less frequently and are less severe than the symptoms and complications from natural disease. Adverse reactions are less frequent after the second dose of vaccine and tend to occur only in individuals not protected by the first dose.

Common reactions to the MMR or MMRV vaccines include soreness, redness and/or swelling where the vaccine was given. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) can be given for fever or soreness.

ASA (Aspirin®) should NEVER be given to children because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye's Syndrome.

Other side effects that can occur six to 23 days after immunization are fever (with or without rash) and a general feeling of illness or discomfort lasting up to three days, headache, and tiredness. Other less common reactions include swelling of the cheeks and neck, rash, and pain in the joints.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a rare possibility of a severe allergic reaction. This can include hives, difficulty in breathing or swelling of the throat, tongue, or lips. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate attention should any reaction occur after leaving the clinic.

Report any serious or unexpected side effects to a health care provider.

For more information on measles:

- Talk to your health care provider or public health nurse.
- Call Health Links-Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll-free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257.

Or, visit:

Manitoba Public Health website

[www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/diseases/
measles.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/diseases/measles.html)

Public Health Agency of Canada website

[www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/
measles.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/measles.html)