

Measles

Public Health Branch – Factsheet

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other medical intervention.¹ Vaccines help your immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause diseases.

What is measles?

Measles is a viral infection that results in a red blotchy rash, high fever (38.3C or higher), red eyes, runny nose and cough that can last for up to two weeks. The rash appears 3-7 days after the fever starts, beginning on the face and spreading down the body. Some people also get a middle ear infection or pneumonia. Although rare, measles can lead to swelling of the brain, which can cause seizures, hearing loss, brain damage or even death.

Measles can be more severe in infants, children younger than 5 years, and adults over the age of 20 and can be life threatening.

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

If you or your child develops any of the above symptoms, it is important to stay home from work, school or child care and CALL your primary health care provider's office PRIOR to your visit to minimize contact with your health care provider's other patients.

How is measles spread?

Measles is highly contagious and can spread easily through the air, or through contact with fluids in the nose or throat. The virus can pass from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or sharing food or drinks. Children may become infected by sharing soothers, bottles or toys that have been in the mouths of other children.

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

Prevention

Immunization is the best way to protect you and your children against measles. All children 12 months of age or older should get the MMR vaccine, which also protects against mumps and rubella. The MMR vaccine contains weakened forms of the measles, mumps and rubella viruses that do not cause disease. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

When you and your child are immunized, you also help protect others because someone who is immunized is less likely to spread infection.

Other precautions you can take: 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; and, wash your hands often with soap and water or clean them with alcohol-based sanitizer if soap and water are not available, especially after coughing or sneezing.

Who should get the MMR vaccine?

It is important to ensure that you and your child(ren) are immunized against measles.

Children 12 months to 17 years of age:

Two doses of MMR should be given for immunization of children and adolescents.

Adults 18 years of age and older: adults born before 1970 are generally presumed to have acquired natural immunity to measles; however, some of these individuals may be susceptible. Adults without contraindications, born in 1970 or later who do not have documented evidence of receiving measles-containing vaccine on or after their first birthday, or laboratory evidence of immunity, or a history of laboratory confirmed measles infection should be immunized with one dose of MMR.

¹ The Public Health Agency of Canada

If you are a health care worker, student, military personnel or traveller, talk to your health care provider. You may require 2 doses of MMR vaccine.

Who should NOT get the MMR vaccine?

Pregnant women.

Anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the MMR vaccine, or to any of the contents of the vaccine (ex. neomycin).

Anyone with a severely weakened immune system. But, anyone with HIV infection should check with their doctor about getting the MMR vaccine.

Anyone who had immune globulins or any other blood products in the past year should speak to their doctor or public health nurse before getting the MMR vaccine.

Anyone who has any of the following should speak with a doctor or public health nurse before they are given the MMR vaccine:

- a severe allergy to eggs
- thrombocytopenia (low platelets)
- a history of convulsions (or family history)

Anyone who currently has a high fever should not be immunized. But the vaccine can still be given if the illness is mild, like a cold.

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

Possible side-effects of the MMR vaccine

Vaccines are known to be very safe. It is much safer for your child to get the vaccine than to get measles.

Common reactions to the vaccine include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. A red rash may also appear between 5 and 12 days after the vaccine is given, but it disappears by itself and does not spread to other people.

Some children may have swelling of the glands in the head and neck, fever, drowsiness, fussiness,

loss of appetite or an upset stomach. These are generally mild reactions and usually last one to two days.

Temporary joint pain may occur in teenage and adult women. Occasionally a high fever can cause seizures.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or Ibuprofen (Advil®) 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.

Rarely, mild, temporary blood clotting problems have been reported. In very rare cases, a child may have inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) or deafness. This is so uncommon (about one case per million doses), that it is uncertain whether the vaccine is the cause.

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 breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate treatment. Report any serious or unexpected side effects to a public health nurse or doctor.**

For more information on measles:

Talk to your doctor, nurse practitioner 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/index.html

Public Health Agency of Canada website

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/index-eng.php