



Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Measles

What is it?

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus. Since the measles vaccine was licensed in 1963 there has been a dramatic decline in the number of cases. Although measles is still very common in some parts of the world; most cases in Canada arise from travel or contact with people from areas where measles is common.

The incidence of measles has declined in Ontario since a two-dose MMR vaccination program was introduced in 1996. Measles cases generally occur in young un-immunized children or older children, adolescents and adults who received only one dose of vaccine.

How is it spread?

The measles virus is spread easily from person to person through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes, by having direct contact with nose and throat secretions and less commonly by having contact with articles freshly contaminated with nose and throat secretions. The measles virus can remain contagious in the air or on contaminated surfaces for at least 2 hours. Measles is contagious 4 days before and 4 days after the start of the rash. All people who have not had the disease or who have not been fully immunized are at risk of getting measles if they are exposed to the virus.

What do I look for?

Symptoms of measles include, fever, runny nose, cough, drowsiness, irritability, soreness and redness of the eyes, and small white spots in the mouth. A red blotchy rash appears on the third to seventh day, beginning on the face and spreading down the body. Complications of measles can include diarrhea, pneumonia, hearing loss or inflammation of the brain. Anyone with symptoms of measles should see a doctor/health care provider. It is recommended to call ahead to notify the clinic before arrival and to mask before entering the clinic. Laboratory tests will be done to determine whether or not the person has measles.

If measles is suspected, stay home; do not attend school, childcare, workplaces, sporting events or any group settings until 4 days after the rash appeared.

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How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for a person with measles. Supportive care such as plenty of fluids, rest and good nutrition can help to avoid complications.

How can I protect myself?

- Measles is best prevented by vaccination.
- See 'Facts About... Measles, Mumps, Rubella Vaccines'.
- Keep up to date with vaccinations and speak to your doctor/healthcare provider about your need for other vaccines.
- Speak with your doctor/health care provider if you are travelling to an area where measles has been reported.
- Measles, Mumps and Rubella vaccine is recommended ideally within 72 hours after exposure.
- Measles Immune globulin (Ig) may be recommended for infants less than 12 months of age, pregnant women or people who have a lowered immune system within 6 days of exposure to the disease.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitizer when hands are not visibly dirty.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow and encourage others to do the same.
- Wash your hands after handling nose and throat discharges (e.g., after disposal of facial tissues containing nose and throat discharges).
- Do not share water bottles, straws, eating utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, toys or anything that has been in contact with saliva, nose or throat secretions.
- If you are ill, stay at home and isolate yourself from others.

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