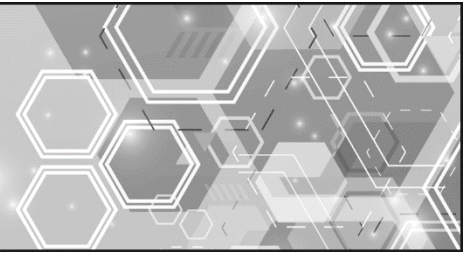




Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Measles

What is it?

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by a respiratory virus. Since the measles vaccine became available in 1963, there has been a dramatic decline in the number of cases. In Ontario, measles has been rare for many years because of its high vaccination rates and the past successful elimination of measles in Canada.

However, due to an increase in measles activity globally in 2024, Ontario and other provinces started to observe an increase of measles cases and multi-jurisdictional outbreaks. As a result, a province-wide measles outbreak was declared in October 2024.

Effective October 6, 2025, the Ontario measles outbreak was declared over due to a steady decline of measles activity in the province. However, measles continues to circulate in Canada and globally. On November 10, 2025, the Public Health Agency of Canada announced that Canada lost its measles elimination status because the same measles strain kept spreading for more than 12 months.

Vaccination is the best protection against measles. For children and most adults born in or after 1970, this means receiving two doses of measles-containing vaccine (e.g., MMR vaccine).

How is it spread?

The measles virus can be spread easily from person to person through the air when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes, by having direct contact with nose and throat secretions. The virus can enter the body through the eyes, nose, or mouth. Less commonly, measles virus can be spread 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.

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What do I look for?

Symptoms of measles include:

- High fever (greater than or equal to 38.3 degrees Celsius)
- Runny nose
- Cough
- Red and watery eyes
- Feeling tired
- Small white spots (Koplik spots) on the inside of the mouth and throat
- Drowsiness, irritability
- About three to seven days after symptoms begin, a red blotchy rash appears that typically begins on the head and spreads down the body to the arms and legs.
- The rash disappears in the same order of appearance (head to foot) in about four to seven days

People who have received one or two doses of measles vaccine may present with milder symptoms.

Infants under 12 months of age, people who are pregnant or have a weak immune system can get very ill from measles. Measles in pregnancy can lead to premature delivery, low birth weight and miscarriage.

Measles can also lead to other complications include dehydration, ear infections, diarrhea, lung infection (pneumonia), blindness, swelling of the brain (encephalitis), hearing loss, seizures, permanent brain damage (subacute sclerosing panencephalitis) and death.

Anyone with symptoms of measles should see a doctor/health care provider. Call ahead to notify the clinic before arrival and wear a 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.

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?

- Vaccination is the best way to prevent measles.
- 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.

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- Speak with your doctor/health care provider to ensure you are protected against measles prior to travelling within and outside of Canada.
- If you have been exposed to the measles virus:
 - Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) 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.
- Visit durham.ca/measles for more information how to protect yourself and others from measles.

December 15, 2025

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