



Measles (Red Measles)

What is measles?

Measles, also called red measles, is a very contagious infection that is caused by the measles virus. It is usually more severe in infants and adults than in children.

What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms of measles may develop 7 to 21 days after exposure to an infected person. Symptoms include a high fever, runny nose, cough, drowsiness, irritability and red eyes. Small white spots may appear in the mouth and throat. A red blotchy rash begins to appear on the face 3 to 7 days after the start of symptoms, then spreads down the body to the arms and legs. This rash usually lasts 4 to 7 days. Symptoms generally last from 1 to 2 weeks.

How do you get measles?

Measles is spread when a person comes in contact with an infected person. It is spread through droplets from the nose, mouth or throat when an infected person is coughing, sneezing or talking. Measles is one of the most highly communicable diseases.

When is measles contagious?

Measles is highly contagious from 4 days before the rash to 4 days after the onset of rash. Children diagnosed with measles should be excluded from school or childcare facilities until 4 days after the appearance of the rash.

Is measles dangerous?

Complications of a measles infection are rare but can be dangerous. Ear infections are a common complication, 1 in 10 cases will develop pneumonia, 1 in 1,000 cases develop swelling in the brain, and one death occurs for every 3000 cases. Pneumonia accounts for 60% of the deaths due to measles, mostly in infants.

Is there treatment for measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles. However, individuals may require treatment or hospitalization if they develop serious complications from this infection.

How can I protect myself against measles?

The best way to protect yourself against measles is to receive the measles vaccine. This vaccine is combined with the vaccine for mumps and rubella and is known as the MMR vaccine. MMR is a very safe vaccine. One dose of the measles vaccine provides immunity for 85% to 95% of individuals, and a second dose increases immunity levels to 99%. The vaccine is given to children at 12 months of age and again at 4 to 6 years of age.

How do I know if I am protected against measles?

After being infected with measles, immunity is generally life long. Immunization with 2 doses of the measles vaccine provides almost 100% protection against measles. Adults born prior to 1970 can be assumed to have acquired natural immunity to measles. Adults born in or after 1970 without evidence of immunity to measles should receive 1 dose of the MMR vaccine. If you are unsure of your immunization status, contact your health care provider.

What should I do if I develop the symptoms of measles?

If you develop symptoms of measles, you should be assessed by a physician, and notify the health care facility that you plan to visit so that staff are aware of your symptoms prior to your arrival. In the meantime, stay at home to avoid potentially exposing other people (“home isolation”). Measles is diagnosed by a blood test, a urine sample and a nasopharyngeal swab.

For further information call Ottawa Public Health Information at 613-580-6744, visit ottawa.ca/health, or visit the websites listed below:

- Canadian Paediatric Society
<http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/measles>
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/publications/immune/mmr.aspx>