



Frequently Asked Questions – Measles

What is measles?

Measles infection is caused by a virus, and spreads between people very easily. This could be from the air when they cough or sneeze, or by touching something that someone with measles has coughed or sneezed on. Measles can also spread very easily in households and in other places where people mix closely together. It commonly affects people of all ages, but it is often most frequently seen infecting young children.

What are symptoms of measles?

Once symptoms start, people can become unwell quickly. Symptoms usually appear 10 to 12 days (sometimes 21 days) after catching the infection. Measles usually starts with cold-like symptoms, such as:

- A high temperature
- A runny or blocked nose
- Sneezing
- A cough
- Red, sore, watery eyes

A rash usually appears 2 to 4 days after the cold-like symptoms start. The rash starts on the face and behind the ears before spreading to the rest of the body. The spots of the measles rash can sometimes be raised, may join to form blotchy patches, and they are not usually itchy. The rash looks brown or red on white skin, and may be harder to see on brown and black skin.

Small white spots may also appear inside the cheeks and on the back of the lips a few days later, and will usually last a few days.

How serious is measles?

Around 1 in 15 people with measles can become seriously unwell. Younger children, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to experience more serious complications, such as:

- Ear infections
- Lung infection (pneumonia)
- Diarrhea
- Dehydration
- Brain swelling or fits (seizures)
- Loss or early birth of the baby during pregnancy

How do you prevent measles?

The best way to prevent measles is to get 2 doses of the measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (MMR and MMRV) vaccines. In Ontario, the MMR vaccine is routinely given at 1 year of age, and the MMRV at 4 years of age. You are also protected from measles if you have had the infection before.

Students in Junior Kindergarten through to Grade 12 can receive their measles vaccines through their doctor, or by booking an appointment with a Toronto Public Health Immunization Clinic. Individuals or families who missed this vaccine as a child can still get vaccinated now.

Connect with your doctor or visit toronto.ca/immunization to learn more.

What to do if you or someone you know might have measles?

Call your doctor or Telehealth Ontario immediately. Don't go to the doctor's or any other healthcare setting without calling ahead first to prevent the further spread of measles.

Before a rash appears, you can easily spread the infection to people you have close contact with. Once the rash develops, you can still spread the infection for another 4 days. If you have been told by a healthcare professional that you might have measles, you should stay away from childcare, school or work for at least 4 days from when your rash first appeared. After 4 days if you feel well and no longer have a temperature, you can return to your normal activities.

How do you recover from measles?

Rest and drink plenty of fluids, such as water, to avoid dehydration. Measles can also cause other illnesses, and you may be given antibiotics to treat them.



Book a one-to-one phone conversation with a VaxFacts+ doctor to get your questions answered:
[SHN.ca/VaxFacts](https://shn.ca/VaxFacts)