

# Measles, Mumps, Rubella, Varicella (MMR-Var) Vaccine

## Get protected, get immunized.

- Vaccines make your immune system stronger. They build antibodies to help prevent diseases.
- Immunization is safe. It is much safer to get immunized than to get these diseases.

## What is the MMR-Var vaccine?

The MMR-Var vaccine protects against measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella (chickenpox). The MMR-Var vaccine is free.

## What is measles?

Measles is a virus that spreads easily through the air when someone who has measles coughs, sneezes, yells, sings, or breathes. It can cause:

- a high fever
- a cough
- a runny nose
- red eyes
- a rash that appears 3 to 7 days after the fever starts, usually beginning behind the ears and on the face and spreading down to the body and then to the arms and legs. The rash appears red and blotchy on lighter skin colours. On darker skin colours, it can appear purple or darker than the skin around it, or it might be hard to see.

Measles can be dangerous because:

- 1 in 10 people with measles will get middle ear or lung infections
- 1 in 1,000 people will get encephalitis (swelling of the brain), which can lead to seizures, deafness, or brain damage
- 1 to 3 of every 1,000 people with measles could die

## What is mumps?

Mumps is a virus that spreads by coughing, sneezing, or having contact with saliva (such as kissing or sharing toys). You can have no symptoms but still spread mumps. It can cause:

- a fever
- a headache
- swelling of the glands around your jaw
- swelling of the testicles or ovaries
- deafness
- encephalitis
- meningitis (infection of the fluid and lining that cover the brain and spinal cord)

## What is rubella?

Rubella is a virus that spreads by coughing or sneezing. It is usually mild. It can cause:

- a fever
- a sore throat
- swollen neck glands
- a rash with red, raised bumps
- painful, swollen joints
- encephalitis
- a bleeding disorder

See reverse for more information.

If you get rubella while you are pregnant, it can cause loss of a baby during pregnancy (miscarriage or stillbirth) or the baby may be born with disabilities.

## What is varicella (chickenpox)?

Varicella is a virus that can cause a fever and an itchy rash that looks like small water-filled blisters. It spreads easily through the air by coughing, sneezing, or by touching open blisters.

It is usually mild, but can be more serious in newborns, adults, and people with weak immune systems. People who get varicella can have:

- skin infections
- pneumonia (a type of lung infection)
- blood infections
- other deadly infections

## Who should get the MMR-Var vaccine?

As part of the routine immunization schedule, children get this vaccine starting at age 12 months up to and including 12 years. You do not get this vaccine if you are older than 12 years.

This vaccine may also be recommended for children if they have had recent contact with the measles virus and have not had all of the recommended number of doses of measles vaccine.

## Does my child need this vaccine if they already had varicella?

Depending on your child's age, they may still need this vaccine even if they already had varicella.

- If your child had varicella before 1 year of age, they are considered not protected for varicella and should get this vaccine.
- If your child was born on or after August 1, 2012, they should get this vaccine even if you think they already had varicella. This is because with many people being immunized against varicella since that date, it is more likely the illness your child had was not varicella (it may have been a different rash or infection). If your child was tested at the time of their illness and the test confirmed it was varicella, then they may not need this vaccine. They can get a different vaccine that protects them against measles, mumps, and rubella only. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have questions about which vaccine your child needs.
- If your child was born before August 1, 2012 and had varicella at 1 year of age or older, they are considered protected for varicella. They can get a different vaccine that protects them against measles, mumps, and rubella only.

## How many doses do I need?

Children need 2 doses. As of January 1, 2021, children can get their first dose at age 12 months and their second dose at age 18 months.

If your child is 18 months or older and they have not had their second dose of MMR-Var vaccine, they can get the second dose at least 3 months after their first dose.

Children may get the second dose earlier if they are travelling outside of Canada or to areas within Canada where measles is spreading or if they have had recent contact with the measles virus. How long you need to wait to get your second dose depends on what vaccine you are getting (MMR or MMR-Var). Check with your healthcare provider when you can get your second dose.

If a child gets a second dose of this vaccine less than 3 months from their first dose, it is considered off-label use. "Off-label use" means the vaccine is used differently than the way it was originally approved. Vaccine experts support using the MMR-Var vaccine this way and have no safety concerns with this off-label use.

## Are there other vaccines that protect against measles, mumps, rubella, and varicella?

The MMR vaccine protects against measles, mumps, and rubella. Younger babies (ages 6 to 11 months), children who do not need varicella vaccine, children over age 12 years, and adults who need a vaccine for measles, mumps, or rubella can get this vaccine.

The varicella vaccine protects against varicella.

## How well does the vaccine work?

After 2 doses, protection is about:

- 100% for measles
- 95% for rubella
- 76% to 95% for mumps
- 98% for varicella

## Where can I get the MMR-Var vaccine?

You can get the vaccine at your local public health or community health centre.

## Are there side effects from the MMR-Var vaccine?

There can be side effects from the MMR-Var vaccine. They tend to be mild and go away in a few days, but side effects can happen up to 6 weeks after getting this vaccine. They may include:

- redness, swelling, bruising, bleeding, rash, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- a rash, including a measles-like rash (a blotchy, red rash), rubella-like rash (rash with red, raised bumps), or varicella-like rash (rash with water-filled blisters)
- getting upset easily
- a sore throat, cough, or runny nose
- a fever
- vomiting (throwing up) or loose stool (diarrhea)

At least 1 out of 100 people who got this vaccine reported 1 or more of these side effects. In some cases, it is unknown if the vaccine caused these side effects.

It is important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after your vaccine. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine to treat the symptoms.

It is rare to have a serious side effect after a vaccine. Call Health Link at 811 to report any serious or unusual side effects.

## How can I manage side effects?

- To help with soreness and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area where your child had the needle.
- There is medicine to help with a fever or pain. Check with your child's healthcare provider if you are not sure what medicine or dose to give. Follow the directions on the package.
- Children under the age of 18 years should **not** take aspirin for 6 weeks after getting a vaccine that protects against varicella (unless your healthcare provider has told you to take it) because it can cause serious health problems.
- If your child gets a rash that looks like varicella, keep it covered. If you cannot cover your child's rash, keep them away from anyone who is pregnant, newborn babies, and people with weak immune systems. If your child has 50 or more spots, call Health Link at 811.
- Some people with health problems, such as a weak immune system, must call their healthcare provider if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your child's healthcare provider even if you think the fever is from the vaccine.

## Who should not get the MMR-Var vaccine?

Your child may not be able to get this vaccine if:

- They have an allergy to any part of the vaccine.
- They had a blood product in the past 11 months.
- They had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it.
- They had another live vaccine in the past 3 months.
- They have a weak immune system (because of medicine they take or a health problem).
- They have seizures or a family history of seizures.
- They have a family history of a weak immune system.
- They had an organ or stem cell transplant.
- They are pregnant.

If your child has allergies or has had a side effect from this vaccine in the past, check with your child's healthcare provider or a public health nurse before they get the vaccine.

Although your child can get the vaccine if they have a mild illness such as a cold or fever, they should stay home until they are feeling better to prevent spreading their illness to others.

## My child is afraid of needles. How can I help my child prepare for their immunization?

Many children are afraid of needles. You can do many things before, during, and after your child's immunization to help them be more comfortable.



Scan the QR code, visit [ahs.ca/vaccinecomfort](https://ahs.ca/vaccinecomfort), or call Health Link at **811** for information.

## For more information about immunization



Call Health Link at **811**



Scan the QR code or go to [ahs.ca/immunize](https://ahs.ca/immunize)