

Caring for Measles

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Measles is one of the most contagious viruses in humans and can be dangerous. Anyone who has not previously had measles or the vaccine can become infected.

The first symptoms of measles typically appear about 7 to 18 days after contact with the virus. These symptoms include a fever of 38.3° C or higher, cough, runny nose and/or red eyes, and a rash that appears 3 to 7 days after 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. Tiny white spots may also appear inside the mouth.

Measles can be dangerous, especially for young children and those with weakened immune systems. Measles can cause pregnancy complications and can harm the baby and children less than five years of age are most at risk of complications.

- One in 10 people with measles will get middle ear or lung infections.
- One in 1,000 people with measles will get swelling of the brain, which can lead to seizures, deafness, or brain damage.
- One to ten in 10, 000 people with measles will die.
- In 1963, before widespread immunization, measles caused about 60,000 cases each year in Canada.

While people may be able to recover at home with rest, fluids, and pain relief, it's important to monitor symptoms closely. Seek medical attention if symptoms worsen or if you're concerned about the person's condition.



Staying home

Anyone with measles or symptoms of measles **must** stay at home and away from others to prevent the spread of this very contagious disease. A person can spread measles to others from 4 days before the rash appears to 4 days after the rash appears. To care for measles at home:

- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Get plenty of rest to help the body heal.
- Eat healthy, nutritious foods to support the immune system.

- Talk to a healthcare provider about taking safe and appropriate vitamin supplements.
- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) for pain. Read and follow all instructions on the label.
- Do not use ibuprofen for those are less than 6 months old unless the doctor gave instructions to use it. Do not take aspirin if you are younger than 18 of age, as it has been linked to Reye syndrome, a serious illness.
- Antibiotics are not required for most people with measles, but may be prescribed if there are complications such as pneumonia.
- Try not to scratch the rash.
- Stay away from smoke. Do not smoke or let anyone else smoke around you or in your home.
- Rest eyes often. If eyes are sensitive to light, close the window blinds in the room and limit screen time.



Call the Measles Hotline

If further medical care is needed, call the measles hotline at **1-844-944-3434** before visiting any healthcare facility, family physician clinic, or pharmacy.

- Seek medical care if you or your child:
 - Have a persistent fever. While fever is common with measles, a fever that lasts more than a few days or gets worse may be a sign of a bacterial infection - a common complication of measles. Medical assessment is needed if the fever persists or symptoms worsen, including dehydration or vomiting.
 - Are sensitive to light or are very sleepy.
 - Seem to improve but then symptoms return.
 - Show signs of dehydration from diarrhea and vomiting, such as:
 - Feel dizzy or light-headed or feel faint.
 - Have dry eyes and and/or a dry mouth.
 - Are not drinking fluids and not urinating or urinating only a small amount.

Call 911 anytime emergency care may be needed. Explain the symptoms and say that the person may have measles. For example, call 911 if the person:

- Has severe trouble breathing (such as using belly muscles to breathe, the chest sinking in, or nostrils flaring while struggling to breathe).
- Has a seizure.
- Appears confused.
- Has a fever with a stiff neck or a severe headache.





Wear a mask

- You may be asked by a healthcare provider at any clinic, hospital or lab to wear a mask if you are sick or with someone who is sick
- If leaving the house to access medical care, the sick person and accompanying family members should wear a mask that covers the mouth and nose.
- Inform doctors or nurses ahead of time that the individual may have measles before going to a clinic or hospital. This allows precautions to be taken to protect our healthcare system and prevent spreading the virus to healthcare workers or others who could become very sick.

