

FACTS ABOUT

Measles



Measles is a serious infection caused by a virus. It used to be a very common childhood infection. Now, the measles vaccine has virtually stopped all outbreaks of the infection in Canada, especially in provinces with compulsory immunization programs.

Children with measles usually have a high fever, cough, runny nose, and red eyes. After a few days, they get a rash. The rash starts out as a few red spots, which soon join together and cover the body.

The infection can make children very ill and they may need to be hospitalized. One in 10 children may get an ear infection or pneumonia. On rare occasions measles causes brain damage. Adults who get measles are usually very sick; the infection often leads to complications such as pneumonia.

The measles virus is very infectious and spreads easily from person to person through the air. It is infectious from about 3 to 5 days before the rash appears, and up to four days after that. Almost everyone who has not been immunized or has not already had measles and is then exposed will get the infection.

If a child had not been immunized and is exposed to measles, the infection can be prevented with an injection of immune globulin. Immune globulin contains antibodies, substances that can prevent infection. The measles vaccine should be given about three months after the immune globulin to children who are at least 12 months old.

There is no medication to cure measles. Antibiotics have no effect because measles is caused by a virus.

Things Parents Can Do

- If another child has been diagnosed with measles, check your child's immunization record to see if he or she has had the measles or MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine. If so, it is very unlikely that your child will develop measles if exposed to another child with the infection.
- Do not take your child for a vaccination if the child already had measles diagnosed with a blood test by a physician.
- Contact your physician or the local public health agency if your child has not had the measles or MMR vaccine. They will tell you if your child needs a measles vaccination or an injection of immune globulin. Your child must get one of these before returning to the school. If the child gets neither, he or she will have to remain out of school for two weeks after the last case of measles in the school has occurred.
- If your child has measles, he or she should not return to school until at least four days after the rash begins.
- Measles can be prevented by immunization.

Adapted from Canadian Paediatric Society "Well Beings"

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