

What is Measles?

Measles is a highly contagious illness caused by a virus. Measles is spread by breathing in air that contains the virus or by contact with droplets from the nose or throat of an infected person. The measles virus can live in the air or on surfaces for up to two hours after an infected person has coughed or sneezed. Symptoms can include fever, runny nose, cough, red eyes, a red rash that begins on the face and spreads down the body, and small blue-white spots (Koplik spots) that can appear on the inside of the mouth and throat. A person with measles is contagious from four days before to four days after the rash appears. Complications of measles can include ear infections, diarrhea, pneumonia, and in rare cases, more severe complications such as swelling of the brain, blindness, and death.

How do I prevent Measles?

Measles is preventable by vaccination. Receiving two doses of the measles vaccine is the best way to protect against the virus and its potentially severe outcomes. Parents should check vaccination records to confirm their child (and all family members) are up to date with their measles vaccinations.

In Ontario, the current childhood vaccine schedule includes 2 doses of measles-containing vaccine before the age of 7: the MMR vaccine (measles, mumps, rubella) at 12 months of age and the MMRV vaccine at 4-6 years of age.

In response to the current community outbreak, GEPH is recommending early vaccination to ensure children are protected and to prevent further spread:

- Early vaccination for infants: a first dose of measles-containing vaccine can be provided as early as 6 months of age. Two additional doses would be recommended after the age of 1 year.
- Early second dose for children between 1 and 4 years of age: children who have received their first dose of measles-containing vaccine are encouraged to receive a second dose as soon as possible (at a minimum of 4 weeks from the first dose).

Those who are unsure of their vaccination status or require vaccination are asked to contact their healthcare provider. Individuals born before 1970 are considered immune due to the prevalence of measles at that time and additional doses of vaccine are not recommended.

What should I do if my child is exposed to the measles virus?

Anyone born in or after 1970 who has not received two doses of a measles containing vaccine (at least 4 weeks apart) or has not had measles before is at risk of infection, if exposed to the measles virus. If your child is not fully vaccinated against measles and you believe they have been exposed to the virus, keep your child home from school or daycare and away from other settings and activities where individuals who are not fully vaccinated

may be for 21 days from last exposure. Monitor for symptoms. Children who previously received 1 dose of measles vaccine may return to school or daycare prior to 21 days once receiving a second dose of vaccine.

Post-Exposure Prophylaxis:

Within 72 hours of exposure, administration of the MMR vaccine may reduce the risk of infection. Within 6 days of exposure, susceptible individuals at higher risk (including infants, pregnant individuals, and immunocompromised individuals) may be eligible to receive immunoglobulin which may prevent or reduce the severity of infection. Contact your health care provider by phone, or if unavailable, contact GEPH infectious disease team:

- Residents of Brantford-Brant: 519-753-4937 ext. 454
- Residents of Haldimand-Norfolk: 519-426-6170 or 905-318-6623

What should I do if my child develops symptoms of measles?

If your child develops symptoms that are consistent with measles, please contact your health care provider right away, or if unavailable, contact GEPH infectious disease team:

- Residents of Brantford-Brant: 519-753-4937 ext. 454
- Residents of Haldimand-Norfolk: 519-426-6170 or 905-318-6623

Symptoms may start anywhere from 7 to 21 days after exposure. Symptoms generally last for one to three weeks. There is no specific treatment for measles once infected but there are ways to help relieve symptoms and prevent complications.

NOTE: It is important to call ahead before visiting a medical clinic or hospital and advise them of an exposure or symptoms to allow them to prepare and prevent the spread of the virus. Anyone who has been exposed to the virus or is experiencing symptoms should wear a medical grade mask when visiting a health care facility.

For more information about measles, visit: www.bchu.org/measles / www.hnhu.org/measles