

# Measles information for patients

August 2025

## How does measles spread?

Measles is a very contagious virus. It spreads through coughing, sneezing, being close to someone who has it, or being in a room where an infected person has recently been. If one person has it, up to nine out of ten people nearby will become infected if they are not immune.

An infected person can spread measles to others even before knowing they have the disease. You can spread measles to others from four days before or after the rash appears.

## Who is at risk?

People who are not immune are at risk of measles. Young children, people who are pregnant and people who have immune system issues are most at risk of severe illness and complications.

Measles can cause serious health complications such as infection of the lungs, inflammation of the brain, and even death. Other complications include ear infections and watery stools. Measles infection during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage, premature birth, poor growth of a baby in the womb, and measles illness in the newborn.

## What are the symptoms of measles?

Early symptoms of measles are fever, cough, runny nose, and red and watery eyes. These are followed by a red, blotchy rash that starts on the face and spreads to the rest of the body. There may also be small white spots inside the mouth, sore throat, watery stools, and abdominal pain.

Symptoms usually start about ten days after exposure but can occur in as little as seven days or as late as 21 days after exposure.

## How can you protect yourself and your community?

You are considered immune to measles if any of the following apply:

- Have had two doses of measles-containing vaccine.
- Born before 1970.
- Have had prior measles infection.

If you are not immune, the best protection is through immunization. Getting immunized also helps protect those around you who may not be able to receive the vaccine, such as young infants, pregnant people, and people with immune system issues.

# Instructions after assessment

## Ways to find your test results:

- Log in to Health Gateway ([www.healthgateway.gov.bc.ca](http://www.healthgateway.gov.bc.ca)).
  - You will need to register and log in with your BC Services Card.
- Follow up with your primary care provider.
- If needed, you can also phone the Northern Health Regional Communicable Disease team 4-5 days after your test at 1-855-755-3555.

## Stay home to prevent spread:

- **If your test is positive for measles:** Stay at home until at least four days after your rash starts (or ten days from when your symptoms start if you do not have a rash)
- **If your test is negative for measles:** Stay at home until your symptoms have resolved and you feel well enough to participate in your usual daily routine and activities
- Avoid sharing a room/space with others in the household; when you are in a shared space, wear a mask.

## See a health care provider right away if you experience:

- |                                                                     |                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| • Difficulty breathing                                              | • Ear pain                                                                                                                |
| • Drowsy, confused, or difficulty waking up                         | • Seizure or stiff neck                                                                                                   |
| • Fever does not go away                                            | • Rash with bruising or bleeding                                                                                          |
| • Severe dehydration (e.g. no tears, sunken eyes, low/no urination) | • If pregnant: decreased baby movements, or signs of preterm labour (e.g., contractions, fluid leakage, vaginal bleeding) |

Please **call ahead** before visiting your health care provider or emergency department. This allows health care staff to prepare and prevent further spread of infection.

**If you test positive for measles, share this information with your household members and others you have spent time with since the day before your symptoms started:**

- Share this information sheet and let them know they have been exposed to measles. They should self-monitor for symptoms and consult their healthcare provider if they develop measles symptoms. They can call the Northern Health Virtual Clinic for testing advice if they do not have a primary care provider.
- If they are not immune and within six days of exposure, they may be able to receive a vaccine or immune globulin (a blood product containing measles antibodies) to prevent or reduce severity of infection. They can call the Northern Health Virtual Clinic for preventive treatment advice.
- If they are not immune and do not receive vaccine or immune globulin in time, they can help prevent spread by staying home for 21 days from their latest exposure.

Northern Health Virtual Clinic (NHVC) can be reached at 1-844-645-7811. Their services described above are available to everyone, even if they do not have valid Medical Services Plan (MSP) coverage.

For more information, visit: [www.northernhealth.ca/measles](http://www.northernhealth.ca/measles).

