



August 2011

# Measles

## What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease and is sometimes called “hard measles” or “red measles” because of the presence of a red rash.

Most people recover completely from measles, but the illness can be more severe for infants and adults. Measles infection can cause complications such as ear infections, diarrhea, lung infections or swelling and inflammation of the brain. Both acute and delayed deaths in infants and children have been reported. If a pregnant woman gets measles, she may be at higher risk of having a miscarriage, a low-birthweight infant or an early delivery.

## What are the symptoms of measles?

Symptoms can appear between 7 and 18 days after contact with an infected individual and may begin with a cough, runny nose, fever, red watery eyes and Koplik spots (small spots with a white center inside the mouth). A red, blotchy rash appears on the third to the seventh day, beginning at the hairline and spreading down the body to the arms and legs. Some people may also experience sensitivity to light. The rash disappears in the same order of appearance (head to foot) in about four to seven days. The illness lasts for 10 days on average.

## How does measles spread?

Measles spreads easily from person to person through droplets from the mouth, nose and throat of an infected person. These droplets spread through talking, coughing or sneezing. Although less common, the virus can also spread through contact with items (such as tissues) that have been freshly soiled with nose and throat discharges.

A person with measles can spread the virus from four days before the rash appears up until four days afterwards.

## How can measles be prevented?

Measles can be prevented through vaccination:

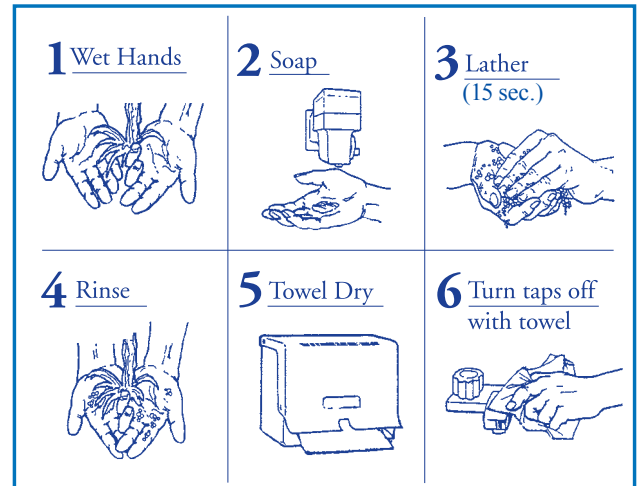
- All children should receive the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine after they turn 12 months of age, and again at 18 months of age.
- Adults born after 1970 who have not had a measles vaccine or have not had natural measles infection should receive a dose of the MMR vaccine. A second dose of MMR vaccine may be recommended for adults born in 1970 or later who have an increased risk of exposure to measles, such as: travellers who visit countries where measles is common, health care workers, military recruits and students at post-secondary institutions.

It is generally assumed that adults born before 1970 have acquired natural immunity to measles.

**For further information, please call:  
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653  
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)**

To prevent spreading the infection to others, a person with the measles should stay home from school, work, or daycare plus any other activities outside the home for four days after the rash appears. It is also important to practise good hygiene and handwashing:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If a tissue isn't available, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands
- Put your used tissue in the waste basket
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing. Wash with soap and water, using the six-step method in the diagram, or clean hands with an alcohol-based hand cleaner



## What is the treatment for measles?

There is no specific treatment for measles, other than as follows:

- Bed rest is recommended
- Avoid brightly lit areas until sensitivity to light passes
- See your physician if the illness worsens, such as developing ear or lung infections. Call before going to a doctor's office or clinic to let them know you have measles. This will assist health care providers in preventing further spread of the disease
- Treat the fever and itching as directed by your doctor

Most people who get measles recover completely. However, pregnant women or children under one year of age who have been exposed to measles and have not yet been immunized should consult a physician within 72 hours of exposure.

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