

Measles in children: What you need to know



What is measles?

Measles is a very contagious virus. It spreads through coughing, sneezing, or being close to someone who has it. You can even get it by being in a room where an infected person was — up to 2 hours after they have left. Measles can be serious, especially for young kids and people who have not had the vaccine.



What are the symptoms?

Measles usually appears in stages:



About 1 or 2 out of every 10 children with measles will need to go to the emergency room or stay in the hospital because of problems like ear infections or pneumonia.

Measles can make children very sick.

Early symptoms (days 1 – 4)



- High fever (often > 38.5°C or 101.3°F)
- Runny nose, cough
- Red, watery eyes
- Feeling tired and not wanting to eat



Later symptoms (days 3 – 7)

- A red, blotchy rash that starts on the face and spreads to the rest of the body
- Small white spots inside the mouth called Koplik spots



How to care for your child at home

- Give lots of fluids to keep them hydrated.
- Use acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever (do not use aspirin).
- Make sure they get lots of rest.
- Keep your child home for at least 4 days after the rash starts.



Protecting others

- Household members who are not immune to measles should also stay home as they may have contracted measles, unless they receive post-exposure prophylaxis (vaccine or immune globulin) in time to prevent illness.
- Stay away from babies, pregnant people, and anyone with a weak immune system.

More information on next page →



Provincial Health
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When to see a health care provider

Take your child to a health care provider right away if they:

- Have a hard time breathing, fast breathing, or loud breathing sounds.
- Are drowsy, confused, or hard to wake up.
- Have a fever that will not go away (above 39.5°C or 103°F).
- Are not drinking or show signs of dehydration (dry mouth, no tears, sunken eyes or not going pee as much).
- Complain of ear pain or pull at their ears.
- Have a seizure or a stiff neck.
- Have a rash with bruising or bleeding.
- Seem to be getting worse after the rash starts.



Important: If you go to a clinic or hospital, call ahead so they can take steps to stop the virus from spreading.



Treatment

- There is no special medicine to treat measles, but there are ways to help with the symptoms. Follow the **“How to care for your child at home”** section on page 1.
- Vitamin A may help some children who are sick with measles, but it does not stop people from getting it. In BC, doctors only recommend it for kids who are sick enough to be in the hospital, or those with weak immune systems. Too much vitamin A can make you sick (e.g. with vomiting, diarrhea, and dizziness).



Prevention

- The MMR vaccine (Measles, Mumps, Rubella) is safe and works well.
- Kids should get two doses: one at 12–15 months and another at 4–6 years.
- In areas with lots of measles cases, public health might recommend getting the vaccine earlier.
- Vitamin A does not prevent measles.



Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or local public health office/health center.

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