

Prevent the spread of measles in your community

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious virus that spreads through air and can cause severe health complications in some people. People who are most at risk from measles are those who are completely unimmunized against the virus and have not had a previous measles infection. The most effective way to protect yourself, your loved ones, and your community is to stay up to date with your immunizations.

How does measles spread?

Measles is spread through air when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. The virus can linger in the air and remain on surfaces for several hours. A person can spread measles from 4 days before developing the measles rash to 4 days after the rash starts. That means someone can spread the measles before knowing they are sick.

You can catch measles by:

- Breathing air in a room recently occupied by someone with measles.
- Touching contaminated objects (e.g., doorknobs, tables, toys) and then touching your face.
- Sharing food, drinks, or products that produce smoke (e.g., cigarettes/ e-cigarettes).
- Having close contact with someone who is infected, even before they show symptoms.

What are the symptoms of measles?

- Measles symptoms typically appear 7 to 21 days after exposure and often begin with a fever, cough, runny nose, red and watery eyes, and small white spots inside the mouth. A red, blotchy rash usually follows, starting on the face and neck before spreading to the rest of the body, lasting about 4 to 7 days.
- Measles infection can lead to complications such as ear infections, pneumonia, diarrhea, and, in rare cases, brain inflammation (encephalitis) or death.

Who is most at risk?

The risk of getting measles is extremely high among those who are not immunized or have not had measles infection in the past, including:

- Infants, including children under 12 months, who have not been immunized.
- Individuals who have not had measles infection in the past and are not fully immunized.
- Pregnant individuals who are not immunized.
- Travelers to areas with measles outbreaks who are not immunized.
- People with severely weakened immune systems.

Who is considered protected from measles?

You are considered protected against measles if:

- You have received 2 doses of a measles vaccine.
- You were born before 1970, as prior to this date, measles circulated widely and individuals will have been immunized or acquired immunity from infection.
- You have had a known measles infection.

How can you protect yourself and your community from measles?

Measles vaccines are safe and the most effective way to prevent measles and protect yourself and your loved ones. In B.C., the measles vaccine is provided free of charge and given as a 2 dose series as part of routine childhood immunizations. Measles vaccines are also available at no cost to others who need protection against measles, including:

- Infants aged 6 to 11 months: should receive 1 dose, if traveling to areas with active measles or if recently exposed. **Note:** This early dose does not count toward the routine series - 2 additional doses are still needed at 12 months and again at 4 to 6 years to be fully immunized.
- People born in 1970 and later, who have not been immunized:
 - o If they only have received one dose, they should get a second dose.
 - o If they have no record of receiving a measles vaccine, they should receive 2 doses.

How do you know if you have been immunized for measles?

Measles vaccination is part of routine childhood immunizations. Please check that you have received 2 doses of measles vaccine.

- To check your immunization records, log into [Health Gateway](#).
- For more information and to ensure your [health information](#) is up to date, visit [Immunization records HealthLinkBC](#).

What to do if you are unsure about your measles immunization status?

If you're not sure whether you've been fully immunized against measles, speak with your health care provider or call your [local public health unit](#) to speak to a public health professional to determine whether further immunization is needed.

- If you were born in 1970 or later: Ensure you have received two doses of the measles vaccine.
- If you were born before 1970: You are generally considered immune as prior to this date measles circulated widely and individuals will have been immunized or acquired immunity from infection.

All recommended doses are publicly funded and available at no cost through public health units, participating pharmacies and primary care providers.

How to get immunized in B.C.?

In B.C., the measles vaccine is provided free of charge and available at public health units, doctors' or nurse practitioners' offices, and pharmacies (aged 4 years and older). First Nations communities can access it through their community health nurse.

- **To find your local public health unit**, visit the [BCCDC website](#).
- **To locate a pharmacy**, visit the [BC Pharmacy Association website](#) or call your local pharmacy to check if the measles vaccine is available.
- **If you need more information about measles or immunizations**, call at your [local public health unit](#) or visit [HealthLinkBC](#).

If you think you have been exposed to measles?

If you or a family member have been exposed to measles:

- Stay home and limit contact with others to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.
- Watch for symptoms like fever, cough, or rash for 3 weeks.
- If you are not immunized or unsure if you are immune, it is important to take precautions.
- Use the [Measles Exposures and Self-Assessment tool](#) to find out what action you or a loved one should take.

What to do if you become ill?

If you or a family member develops symptoms of measles or suspects infection:

- Please stay home and avoid contact with others for at least 4 days after the rash first appears, as this is when the virus is most contagious.
- If you need to visit a health care facility or provider, please call ahead to inform them of your symptoms. This allows staff to take precautions and prevent further spread.
- If you need more information about measles, call at 8-1-1 or visit [HealthLinkBC](#).

To help reduce the risk of spreading measles to others, practice good hygiene: wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use hand sanitizer, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when coughing or sneezing, avoid sharing food, drinks, or smoking products, clean high-touch surfaces regularly, and keep indoor spaces well ventilated.

For more information about measles and the MMR/MMRV vaccines go to:

[HealthLinkBC: Understanding Measles](#)

Detailed information about measles, available in multiple languages.

[B.C. Centre for Disease Control: Measles](#)

Information about measles for the general public and health care professionals.

[HealthLinkBC: Measles, Mumps and Rubella \(MMR\) Vaccine](#)

Information about MMR vaccine available in multiple languages.

[HealthLinkBC: Measles, Mumps, Rubella and Varicella \(MMRV\) Vaccine](#)

Information about the MMRV vaccine for children aged 4 to 12, available in multiple languages.



Ministry of
Health

August, 2025