

March 7, 2024

Dear Parents/Guardians and School Staff:

Indigenous Services Canada would like to alert you to the increase in measles in Ontario, and remind you of the importance of your and your child's routine vaccinations.

On February 23, 2024, the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) of Canada released a statement regarding the global increase in measles cases and the current risk to Canada. In summary, **measles activity has significantly increased since 2023**. As of March 6, **five measles cases have been reported in Ontario this year**. Most cases involve **unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children**.

Measles is not an illness commonly seen in Canada. However, measles outbreaks can happen when someone who is at risk (e.g., unvaccinated, partially vaccinated) travels and is exposed to measles in a country where it is still commonly circulating. Once they return, the measles virus can spread to their contacts in Canada.

As the number of measles cases in Ontario is rising, we are reminding you of the importance of keeping vaccinations up to date. Vaccinations, including the measles vaccine, are safe and effective at preventing illness. Please make sure you and are your child(ren) are up to date with vaccinations, especially if you are planning to travel out of community.

If you or your child are not up to date with vaccinations or you are unsure, contact your health care provider or community health nurse to discuss vaccination options to keep you, your family, and your community safe.

If you or a member of your family has measles symptoms, please self-isolate at home, avoid contact with non-household members and contact your health care provider. Make sure you call before going to see your health care provider to help prevent spread of infection.

The attached pages detail more information about measles, including measles symptoms, vaccination, and public health measures.

Respectfully,



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### What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus. People can develop measles 7 to 21 days after being exposed. Symptoms include:

- Rash
- Fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes
- Small, white spots inside the mouth
- Sleepiness
- Irritability

While these symptoms are common among many viral illnesses, measles infections are rare and usually occur in isolated outbreaks.

Measles complications may include pneumonia, ear infections, blindness, inflammation of the brain, death, and premature labour and low-birth weight for pregnant individuals.

### Transmission

Measles spreads very easily through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The measles virus can live for up to two hours in the air and on surfaces in a space where an infected person coughed or sneezed. An infected person can spread the virus to others four days before the rash appears, and remains contagious until four days after.

**Recognition of infection and home isolation are critical to preventing spread of measles.**

### Who is at risk?

Individuals at greatest risk of measles complications include:

- Unvaccinated babies and young children
- Unvaccinated pregnant people
- People with weak immune systems

Individuals at higher risk of being exposed to measles include:

- Travelers
- Military personnel
- Healthcare workers
- Students

### Vaccination

The routine childhood immunization schedule includes two doses of measles-containing vaccine. The first dose is given as MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine on or after a child's first birthday. The second dose is given as MMRV (measles, mumps, rubella and varicella [chickenpox]) vaccine at four years of age.

Adults born after 1970 should have received at least one dose of MMR; a second dose of MMR vaccine may be recommended for some people. Adults born before 1970 are *usually* considered to have natural immunity.

**Contact your health care provider or community health nurse for more information about measles vaccination.**

### Treatment

There is no specific treatment for measles infection. Severe complications can be prevented through supportive care including good nutrition and drinking lots of fluids. Close contacts to a measles case may be recommended to receive measles-containing vaccine or a preventative treatment called immunoglobulin, which reduces their risk of infection.

### Public Health Measures

Strongly encourage all community members ensure measles vaccinations are up to date for themselves and their family members. Optimizing vaccination rates is critical to prevent measles outbreaks. Additional public health measures include:

- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your upper sleeve when coughing or sneezing
- Washing your hands often with soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand rub
- Keeping high-touch surfaces clean and disinfected
- If you suspect you have measles:
  - Self-isolate at home, avoid contact with non-household members, and avoid contact with high risk individuals (e.g., pregnant people, babies, young children, people with weak immune systems)
  - Contact your healthcare provider for assessment, ***but*** make sure to phone ahead to protect others

**Vaccination is the key to preventing measles infection, spread and harm to community.**