

# Measles and Back to School

## Information for parents and guardians

### Measles 101

Measles cases are increasing across Alberta, Canada and globally.

Measles is a highly contagious virus that spreads easily through the air when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes. Measles can have very serious and lasting impact for those who become infected.

Measles can be serious at any age; however, children under the age of five years, those who are pregnant and individuals with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of severe outcomes from measles. It is critical that we all do our part to protect the youngest and most vulnerable individuals in our communities from this preventable disease.

### Symptoms

The common symptoms of measles include:

- fever;
- cough, runny nose or red eyes; and
- a rash that appears 3 to 7 days after the fever starts, often beginning behind the ears and on the face and spreading down to the body, arms and legs. The rash appears red and blotchy on lighter skin colours and purple or darker on darker skin.

### Complications

Measles can cause serious complications:

- 1 in 10 people develop ear or lung infections (including pneumonia).
- 1 in 1,000 people develop encephalitis (swelling of the brain), which can lead to seizures, deafness, or brain damage.
- Death is estimated to occur in 1 to 10 of 10,000 measles cases in Canada
- 4 to 11 of every 100,000 people may develop fatal brain inflammation about 10 years later.

### Prevention

The best protection against measles is to ensure you are up to date with your [immunizations](#). The measles vaccine is highly effective at preventing infection and complications from the disease. After just one dose of measles-containing vaccine (given on or after one year of age), protection against measles is about 85 to 95

per cent, and after two doses, protection is almost 100 per cent.

In Alberta, measles-containing vaccine is offered, free of charge, through Alberta's provincially funded immunization program. Children in Alberta typically receive their first dose of vaccine at 12 months of age, and their second dose at 18 months of age.

Adults, born in 1970 or later should have two life-time doses of measles-containing vaccine. Adults born **before** 1970 are generally considered immune.

For those who cannot be immunized (for example: young infants, those who are pregnant, and those with specific immunocompromising conditions), you can reduce the risk of acquiring measles by avoiding communities with significant measles spread, only socializing with people who you know are immunized, and avoiding indoor gatherings.

### How do I know if my child is protected?

To check the immunization record for you or your child, text "vaccine record" to 88111. You can also call the measles hotline at 1-844-944-3434 to check for immunization records or to book an immunization appointment. For more information on routine childhood immunization, including measles, please visit [www.ahs.ca/immunize](http://www.ahs.ca/immunize).

### Measles exposures in school

If a case of measles is infectious while in school, public health teams will work with the school administration to reduce the risk of measles spreading.

If your child has been immunized with two doses of measles containing vaccine, they are considered protected.

If your child is not protected against measles, public health teams will contact you. If a contact is identified quickly, post exposure prophylaxis may be available. It is important that individuals who have been exposed to measles and are not protected stay home from activities in all public settings (including school and childcare facilities), during the period in which they may develop the disease. This period begins five days

after first exposure to a case of measles through 21 days after the last exposure to a case of measles.

By staying home and monitoring for symptoms, this greatly reduces the risk of further spread of disease to other vulnerable individuals.

## **Guidance for parents and guardians**

If you think your child has measles or has been exposed, stay home and call Health Link at 811 or your local healthcare provider for further guidance.

Public health will contact you if your child is diagnosed with measles. They will ask questions and provide information to help prevent spread of infection to others. This includes identifying people who may have been exposed, especially those who are not protected against the disease. If these people are found quickly, steps can be taken to reduce their risk of getting measles. They may ask about:

- Your child's symptoms and when they began;
- Your child's immunization record;
- Anyone your child may have been in contact with and their symptoms, including household members and others;
- The immunization records of household members;
- Public settings your child visited before symptoms started or during the time when they were infectious (for example, childcare facilities, grocery stores, restaurants, social gatherings.)

If your child is infected with measles, it is important to keep your child at home and away from public places, including school and childcare facilities. Staying away from others while infectious protects your school and community.

## **Don't get measles. Get immunized.**

Visit [alberta.ca/measles](https://alberta.ca/measles) for more information.