

## Important Public Health Alert: Measles

**To:** Chiefs, Health Directors, and Community Programming Leads

**Date:** March 12, 2025

On March 6, 2025, the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada released a statement regarding the **concerning trend of increasing measles cases in Canada**. More measles cases were reported in the first two months of 2025 than in all of 2024. This is due in part to cases associated with outbreaks in New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec.

Between January 1, 2025 to March 6, 2025, Canada has recorded **227 measles cases**, with many requiring hospitalization. The **majority of cases are unvaccinated or under-vaccinated children** who were exposed in their communities, such as in social events, daycares, schools and health care settings. Measles is very contagious and can cause serious illness, with complications including pneumonia, deafness, brain inflammation, and in severe cases death.

The full statement is available here: [Statement from the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada on the Increase in Measles Cases and the Risk to People in Canada](#).

To assist you with public health promotion, unbranded resources about [measles](#), [measles vaccine](#), and [travel](#) are available on the [OneHealth portal](#).

### 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 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 2 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 4 days before the rash appears, and remains contagious until 4 days after.

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

### Who is at risk?

Individuals at greatest risk of measles complications include:

- Unvaccinated babies and young children
- Unvaccinated pregnant people
- Immunocompromised people

Individuals at higher risk of being exposed to measles include:

- Travelers
- Military personnel
- Healthcare workers
- Students

In Canada, adults born before 1970 are presumed to have developed natural immunity to measles.

### Treatment

There is no specific treatment for measles infection. Severe complications can be prevented through supportive care that ensures good nutrition and adequate fluid intake. 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 to ensure measles vaccinations are up to date for themselves and their family members.** High vaccination rates are critical to prevent measles outbreaks. Additional public health messaging includes:

- 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, limit your contact with household members, especially those at higher risk of complications, and do not have visitors.
  - 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.**

Respectfully,

Dr. Claudia Sarbu  
Regional Medical Officer, Health Protection Unit  
First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Ontario Region, Indigenous Services Canada