

# Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) Vaccine

The MMR vaccine protects children against measles, mumps, and rubella. These are dangerous, even deadly diseases. Before the vaccine was approved in 1963, almost everyone got measles by the age of 18. In Canada, there were about 300,000 cases of measles every year. After the vaccine, that number fell to less than 20 cases a year. In recent years there have been a few hundred cases after travelers brought the virus back to Canada where it spread locally.

## What Is Measles?

Measles is a severe and highly contagious respiratory infection. It is not “an ordinary infection that children should have.” Sometimes measles is called “red measles” (or rubeola). It should not be confused with “German Measles,” which is another name for rubella.

You can spot measles by: red dots on the skin, coughing, runny nose, light bothering your eyes. Two or three weeks after first contact a fever, sneezing and runny nose appear. Coughing and swelling of the neck glands often follow. Red dots appear on the face or neck, upper chest and arms and legs a few days later. After two or three days, the rash fades and the fever drops. Skin may peel and you may have an ear ache. There is no medicine for measles. Keep those ill away from others and rest in bed. Treat with cough syrup and skin lotions to lessen fever, coughing and itching.

## What Is Mumps?

Mumps is a contagious infection caused by a virus. Mumps is most common in children, although sometimes adults get it too. As a rule you get mumps once.

Mumps can cause a fever, chills, headache and swollen face. It can cause deafness and can cause painful swelling of the testicles in teen boys and men, and may cause them to be sterile. Mumps can cause a painful infection of ovaries in women.

It takes 15 to 21 days before signs show. Mumps can be passed to others for about a week before signs show and about 9 days after. Mumps can be spread by coughing or sneezing; contact with the nose, mouth or eyes of a person with mumps; or touching things like hands, telephones, towels, etc.

Keep those with mumps away from others. Plenty of rest, ice packs or heat packs and acetaminophen (Tylenol) may be offered for comfort. **DO NOT give aspirin (ASA) to children or teens with a viral illness.**

## What Is Rubella?

Rubella – sometimes called “German Measles” – is also caused by a virus and is different from measles. Rubella is generally a mild disease in children. In pregnant women, rubella is serious because it can harm an unborn child. If a pregnant woman gets rubella during the first three months of pregnancy, her baby risks serious birth defect like blindness and brain damage or death.

Symptoms of rubella may include a rash, slight fever, sore joints, headaches, discomfort, runny nose and red eyes. The rash first appears on the face and spreads from head to toe. Glands behind the ears and at the back of the neck may swell, causing soreness and pain.

Many people have few or no symptoms. About half of the people who have the disease get a rash.

## How Can I Protect My Child from Measles, Mumps and Rubella?

- Vaccination can protect your child.
- In Canada, children get two doses of the MMR vaccine.
- The first shot is given at 12 to 15 months of age.
- The second shot is given at 18 months OR between four and six years (before your child starts school).
- It is safe to give the second MMR shot as soon as one month after the first MMR shot, if needed.
- In many provinces, the chickenpox vaccine is combined with the MMR vaccine (the combination vaccine is called MMRV)
- If your child is between six and 12 months old and you live or are travelling to an area that has a known measles outbreak, talk to your child’s doctor about getting an early dose of the MMR vaccine. Keep in mind that your baby will still need to get their regular MMR shot when they are 12 months old.
- Older children and adults born before 1970 and who have not been vaccinated or have not had these infections should also be vaccinated.

## How Safe Is the MMR Vaccine?

- This vaccine is very safe and effective.
- There may be some redness, swelling, or pain at the place where the needle went into the arm or leg. Your doctor can tell you how to control the pain.
- Between six and 23 days after the vaccine, some people will have a mild fever and sometimes a mild rash lasting one to three days. Occasionally adolescents and adults have joint pain (usually in the knees and fingers).
- Fever is more common with MMRV vaccine than with MMR. MMRV vaccine may also cause a few chicken pox-like lesions around the place where the needle went in.

## Who Should Not Get MMR Vaccine?

- Because it is a live (weakened) virus vaccine, it cannot be given to pregnant women or to people who have weakened immune systems.
- Anyone who has a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine (swelling of the face or lips, difficulty breathing or a drop in blood pressure) should not get it again unless seen by a specialist and vaccinated in a special clinic that can control severe reactions.