



INFORMATION SHEET

Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine (MMR)

What is the MMR Vaccine?

The MMR vaccine is a safe and effective way to keep you or your child from getting very sick from measles, mumps and/or rubella. The MMR vaccine is made with a small amount of weakened virus that is unlikely to cause disease but teaches the immune system how to protect itself against infection. This vaccine is routinely given to healthy children and adults 12 months of age or older but can also be given earlier at 6 months of age if travelling to an area with increased risk of exposure to measles.

What are these diseases?

Measles (rubeola), also known as “red measles”, is a virus that causes blotchy red rash, fever, cough, runny nose, and red, watery eyes. Most people fully recover from measles within 2-3 weeks, but measles can be dangerous, especially for infants, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune systems. In some cases, measles can cause swelling of the brain leading to seizures, hearing loss or even death.

Thanks to successful vaccination programs, measles was a rare disease, and considered eliminated in Canada, but outbreaks in unvaccinated communities have been occurring with increasing frequency. Measles is one of the most contagious diseases we know of. You don’t even have to be in the same room as someone with measles to get infected. The measles virus can hang in the air for up to two hours after a person leaves the room. The MMR vaccine is very effective. Receiving two doses is almost 100% effective in protecting against the measles virus.

Mumps is a virus that causes painful swelling of the cheeks and neck, fever, dry mouth, headache, earache, fatigue, sore muscles, loss of appetite, and trouble talking, chewing, or swallowing. Mumps can also cause deafness, meningitis, and infections of the testicles or ovaries.

Immunization is the best way to protect you or your child from getting measles, mumps and/or rubella.

In the NWT, children are recommended to receive MMR at 12 and 18 months

Rubella, also known as “German measles”, is a virus that causes rash and low-grade fever, swelling of the lymph nodes, and achy joints and muscles. Rubella infection in pregnant women can lead to miscarriage and birth defects.

How are these diseases spread?

People spread these viruses through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. You become infected when you breathe in air or touch a surface contaminated with the virus. These viruses can also be spread through contact with an infected person’s saliva or skin lesions through things like kissing, sharing food/drinks, cigarettes, or toys.

If you are unsure if you or your child should receive MMR, book an appointment with your local health care provider to discuss vaccination eligibility.

Who should get the MMR vaccine?

In the NWT, it is recommended that children receive the MMR vaccine at 12 and 18 months. MMR is offered as two doses given at least 4 weeks apart. Infants, 0-6 months cannot be vaccinated but have some natural protection passed to them from their birth parent (if their birth parent was vaccinated). Protection from the birth parent begins to wear off after 6 months. Infants 6-12 months of age can receive an MMR vaccine if they are at risk. If your infant receives a vaccine before 12 months of age, they still require 2- doses of MMR after 12 months to be considered protected.

All adults born on or after 1970 should have 2 doses of MMR vaccine in their lifetime.

Adults born before 1970:

If you were born before 1970, you are assumed to be protected against measles as you likely had contact with measles when you were younger. However, it is recommended that you receive 1-2 doses of measles containing vaccine to ensure protection if you are:

- In the military.
- A health care provider.
- Travelling to regions where measles is circulating.

What are possible side effects to the MMR vaccine?

Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. Side effects, if they occur, are usually mild and go away within a few days. You can give medication for pain/fever if needed. Check with your health care provider if you have concerns or need advice about which medications to give. Through intense research and study, the MMR vaccine has been proven safe and does NOT cause autism in children. Mild side effects may include: swelling, redness, and soreness where you got the vaccine. 1-3 weeks after getting the vaccine, other side effects can include:

- Fever,
- Stiffness,
- Mild rash,
- Face or neck swelling,
- Temporary joint pain.

Who should NOT get the MMR vaccine?

- MMR is a “live” vaccine and can cause measles, mumps or rubella in a person whose immune system is moderately to severely weakened, less than 6 months, or is pregnant. These individuals should NOT receive MMR vaccine. Neither should those with a severe allergy. Please contact your health care provider for more information.

To find out more about the MMR vaccine, contact your local health unit or visit the following links:

- **NWT Immunization Schedule:** <https://www.gov.nt.ca/nwtimmunization/schedule>
- **Immunize Canada** <https://immunize.ca>
- To track of your family’s immunizations and to receive vaccine schedule reminders download the [CANImmunize App](#).

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a rare possibility of a severe allergic reaction. This usually happens soon after vaccination and may include: **hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips.**

If this happens after you leave the clinic, call or go to the nearest emergency department or health centre for immediate treatment.

Please report any serious or unexpected side-effects to your healthcare provider