

Important Public Health Alert #11: Measles Preparedness

To: Chiefs, Health Directors, Pandemic Leads

Date: March 2, 2023

Over the past week, there has been increased measles activity in Ontario. Measles is a highly transmissible, vaccine preventable disease. Measles infection can result in serious health outcomes. To date no cases have been reported in First Nations' communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted immunization rates globally, including in Canada. Although significant immunization catch-up efforts are ongoing, even a small decline in population coverage can result in significant risk and spread of highly transmissible infections like measles.

What is measles?

Measles is a highly infectious viral disease. Symptoms occur 7-21 days after exposure and include fever, cough, runny nose, red eyes, sleepiness and irritability. A red, blotchy rash usually develops 3-7 days after symptom onset starting on the face and spreading down the body. Although not always seen, small white spots on the inside of the mouth are characteristic of measles.

Transmission

Measles is highly contagious and spreads very easily through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can also spread by touching a surface that has the measles virus on it. Measles virus can live for up to two hours in the air and on surfaces in a space where an infectious person has coughed or sneezed. Recognition of infection and home isolation is a key component to preventing measles spread.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for individuals with measles infection. Unvaccinated people who are exposed to measles and at higher risk of complications such as infants, pregnant women and persons with weakened immune systems may be eligible to receive protection through measles immunoglobulin.

Public Health Measures

Measles vaccination is the key to preventing measles infection, spread, and harms to community. In addition to the measles vaccination, communities are encouraged to promote staying up to date with all vaccinations, especially prior to travel. Community members are encouraged to contact their health care provider to ensure the immunizations for themselves and their family are up to date.

FNIHIB-OR continues to work with partners, communities, and local public health authorities to provide advice and support public health response.

Respectfully,

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Please note, This advice is intended to supplement, not replace, the advice of local public health authorities.