

Rubella

What is rubella?

Rubella (or German measles) is an infectious viral disease of humans. Although in most people infection is mild, infection in early pregnancy can cause serious birth defects or miscarriage.

What is congenital rubella syndrome?

- Congenital rubella syndrome occurs in up to 90% of babies born to women who are infected with rubella during the first 3 months of their pregnancy.
- Congenital rubella syndrome can cause birth defects, including heart defects, deafness, brain damage and eye problems such as cataracts.

What are the symptoms?

- The symptoms of rubella may include a mild fever, rash, runny nose, sore throat and often swollen lymph node. Aching joints are also common, especially in women.
- In rare cases, rubella infection can be complicated by lowering of the platelet count (thrombocytopenia), which can cause bleeding, or by encephalitis (inflammation of the brain).

How is it spread?

- Rubella is spread from an infected person by droplets from the nose or mouth or by direct contact. Rubella is easily spread to people who have not been vaccinated or previously infected.
- The time from exposure to onset of illness is usually 14 to 21 days. People with rubella are usually infectious from 7 days before the rash occurs until 4 days later.

Who is at risk?

Anybody who is not immune (either from past infection or vaccination) is at risk of rubella.

How is it prevented?

- People with rubella should stay at home for at least 4 days after onset of rash, and avoid contact with non-immune people.
- The best protection against rubella is through vaccination with MMR vaccine, which protects against infection with measles, mumps and rubella.
- MMR vaccine should be given to children at 12 months and at 4 years of age. Two doses of MMR provides protection against rubella to over 99% of those vaccinated.

- MMR vaccine is a safe and effective vaccine that has been used worldwide for many years.
- While many older adults are immune to rubella because they have been vaccinated or infected as children, young adults (especially men) may not be immunised. Vaccination against rubella is very important for women (and men) of childbearing age in reducing the chance of pregnant women coming into contact with, and contracting, rubella infection.
- It is very important for all women planning a pregnancy to know whether they are immune to rubella. Women planning a pregnancy should have a blood test, which can be done by their local doctor, to check that they are protected against rubella. Rubella vaccine should not be given to pregnant women and pregnancy should be avoided for 1 month following vaccination.

How is it diagnosed?

Rubella can be difficult to diagnose because there are many other viruses that cause similar illnesses with a fever and a rash. Definite diagnosis requires a blood test.

How is it treated?

Treatment for the symptoms of rubella include rest and plenty of fluids.

What is the public health response?

Pregnant women who have come in contact with a case of rubella should call their doctor for advice. Rubella is notifiable by laboratories in NSW under the *Public Health Act*. Statistics on the number of cases are tracked to monitor the impact of the immunisation program, and to identify outbreaks.

For more information please contact your doctor, local public health unit or community health centre.

This fact sheet is available at: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/infectious/rubella.html>