

RUBELLA

WHAT IS RUBELLA?

- Rubella (or German measles) is an infectious viral disease of humans.
- Although most people who get rubella do not experience serious complications, preventing rubella is very important because infection in early pregnancy can cause serious birth defects or miscarriage.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF RUBELLA?

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

WHAT IS CONGENITAL RUBELLA SYNDROME?

- Congenital rubella syndrome occurs in up to 90 per cent of babies born to women who are infected with rubella during the first three months of pregnancy.
- Congenital rubella syndrome can cause birth defects including heart defects, deafness, mental retardation, and eye problems including cataracts.

HOW DO YOU CATCH RUBELLA?

- Rubella is spread from an infected person through the air. Rubella is easily spread to people who have not been vaccinated or had the infection before.
- The time from exposure to the rubella virus to onset of illness is usually 14 to 21 days. People with rubella are usually infectious from seven days before the rash occurs to four days after.

HOW IS RUBELLA DIAGNOSED AND TREATED?

- 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.

- Confirming the diagnosis is important so that other people who may be at risk of rubella, particularly pregnant women, can be identified. Rubella is notifiable by laboratories in NSW.
- Treatment for symptoms of rubella are rest, plenty of fluids and paracetamol for fever. Where rubella causes complications, other treatments may be needed.
- While infectious with rubella, it is important to stay at home so as not to spread the virus to other people.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF AGAINST RUBELLA?

- 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 when they are 12 months and at four years of age. Two doses of MMR provides protection against rubella to over 99 per cent 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 were infected as children, young adults, especially men, may not have received rubella vaccination. Vaccination against rubella is very important for women (and men) of child bearing age to prevent the possibility of pregnant women coming into contact with and contracting rubella infection.
- It is very important that all women of child bearing age, and especially those planning a pregnancy, 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 two months following vaccination.

For further information contact your doctor, community health care centre or your nearest public health unit.

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