

RUBELLA

What is rubella?

Rubella, commonly called German measles, is a highly contagious viral disease caused by the *Rubella virus*.

For most people, rubella is usually a mild illness, but it can be dangerous to the unborn child of a pregnant woman. If a pregnant woman becomes infected with rubella, especially during the first trimester of pregnancy, there is an increased risk of miscarriage, stillbirth or an infant born with abnormalities.

What are the symptoms of rubella?

In younger children, rubella may cause few or no symptoms. Older children and adults may experience more severe illness. Symptoms may include:

- Mild fever
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Mild runny nose (coryza)
- Red eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Rash that starts on face and spreads throughout body in 24 hours, lasting about three days
- Swollen glands
- Inflammation and pain in joints

It usually takes from 14 to 21 days for symptoms to develop after exposure to the virus.

Diagnosis of rubella must be made by laboratory confirmation because the symptoms of rubella are similar to other common illnesses.

How does rubella spread?

Rubella spreads easily from person to person through droplets from the mouth, nose and throat of an infected person. These droplets spread through talking, coughing or sneezing. The virus can also spread through contact with items (such as tissues) that have been freshly soiled with nose and throat discharges.

A person infected with rubella can spread the virus from seven days before the rash appears up until seven days afterwards. Infants with Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS) may shed the virus for one year after birth.

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How can rubella be prevented?

Rubella can be prevented through immunization. Most people born since 1991 have received two doses of the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine.

Women of childbearing age who are planning to get pregnant should speak with a doctor about protection from rubella. A blood test is available to determine if they are protected. Rubella vaccine should be avoided during pregnancy. Women who are pregnant and have not had a blood test to determine their immunity to rubella should consult their physician if they are exposed to rubella.

To help prevent the spread of the disease, a person with rubella should not attend school, work, daycare, or participate in any activities outside the home for seven days after the appearance of the rash. Practicing good hygiene and proper handwashing are also important to stop the spread of infection.

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands
- Put your used tissue in the waste basket
- Clean your hands after coughing or sneezing
- Wash with soap and water or clean hands with an alcohol-based hand cleaner

How is rubella treated?

There is no specific treatment for rubella. People generally start to feel better within three or four days.