

Rubella- Factsheet

What is rubella?

Rubella (also called German Measles) is a relatively mild, three-day illness caused by a virus. However, it is especially dangerous in women infected during the first few months of pregnancy because the virus can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, or severe birth defects in the unborn baby.

What are the symptoms of rubella?

Rubella is usually a mild illness, with a slight fever, swelling of the lymph glands (especially those in the back of the neck) and a rash that lasts for three days. Symptoms usually appear 16 to 18 days after exposure, with a range of 12 to 23 days. Sometimes people do not develop any symptoms. Older children and adults may have a low-grade fever, headache, weakness, or runny nose before the rash appears. Some people, especially adult women, also get temporary swelling and pain in the joints.

How is rubella spread?

Rubella is spread in droplets from the nose or throat of an infected person, usually when a person coughs or sneezes. It can also spread by direct contact with saliva and discharges from the nose and throat of an infected person. If a person who is pregnant gets infected with rubella, they can also pass the rubella virus to their developing baby in the womb.

How long are people contagious?

Persons infected with rubella are contagious from about seven days before the appearance of the rash through seven days after the appearance of the rash. Babies born with rubella could be contagious for up to the first year of life.

Who gets rubella?

Persons who do not receive the rubella vaccine are the most likely to get this disease. The vaccine is highly effective and long-lasting, and persons who receive two doses of a rubella-containing vaccine (MMR or MMRV) are much less likely to be infected.

What treatment is available for people with rubella?

There is no specific treatment for rubella. Supportive care should be given as needed.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work, or daycare?

People should stay home from work, school, daycare, or other settings where others could be exposed, through seven days after onset of rash. Babies born with rubella may need to stay away from places where others could be exposed for up to the first year of life.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting rubella?

- Keep yourself and your children up to date on immunizations.
- Women of child-bearing age should be fully immunized and advised to delay becoming pregnant for at least three months following immunization.

- Pregnant females who have contact with a person with rubella during their first few months of pregnancy should have their blood tested for infection or immunity and discuss the risk to their baby with their doctor.
- Both male and female health care workers should be immunized against rubella, if they do not already have written evidence of immunization or disease.