

# Rubella (German Measles)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is rubella?**

Rubella is a common childhood disease caused by a virus. It can last one to five days and is generally a mild disease.

### **Who gets rubella?**

Rubella can affect anyone of any age. Once you have had the infection you are usually immune and cannot catch it again. There are still cases of rubella around the world where populations are not vaccinated against the disease.

### **How do people get rubella?**

When an infected person coughs or sneezes, the virus is released into the air and enters another person's body through the nose or throat. Rubella is contagious seven days before and seven days after the rash appears. The rubella virus may also be found in the blood, urine, and stool of people who have the illness.

### **What are the symptoms of rubella?**

Symptoms of rubella show up 14 to 21 days after exposure. Symptoms are often mild, and up to half of people infected with rubella virus have no symptoms at all. Symptoms include:

- Low-grade fever
- Swollen glands or lymph nodes
- Rash
- Small red bumps on the roof of the mouth (known as Forchheimer's sign)
- Dry, flaking skin
- Swollen or bloodshot eyes
- Stuffy nose
- Joint pain and swelling (arthritis)
- Loss of appetite
- Headache

### **Are there complications with a rubella virus infection?**

Rubella is usually a mild disease in children; adults tend to have more complications. The most serious danger of rubella is to pregnant women and the developing fetus. A miscarriage or premature delivery may occur in pregnant women. Women of childbearing age should check with their health care providers to make sure they are protected. A blood test can tell whether or not a person has protection for rubella. Pregnant women who have had rubella or a rubella vaccination are protected. Rubella can also be passed on from a mother to her developing baby through the bloodstream via the placenta.

Up to 85% of babies still in the womb develop serious birth defects when exposed to rubella any time during the first three months of pregnancy. These birth defects include heart defects, deafness, cataracts, spleen and liver damage, mental retardation and bone disease. This is called congenital

rubella syndrome.

Encephalitis (swelling of the brain) occurs in one in 5,000 cases, usually in adults.

### **How is rubella diagnosed?**

If a health care provider suspects rubella, samples of mucus from the nose and throat, blood, urine and/or cerebrospinal fluid will be examined, and the health care provider will observe for symptoms.

### **What is the treatment for rubella?**

There is no cure for rubella, only supportive treatment (bed rest, fluids and fever reduction). Most patients will recover on their own.

### **How can rubella be prevented?**

Rubella is a vaccine preventable disease. Getting vaccinated against rubella will protect people from getting the disease. The rubella vaccine is given in combination with the vaccines for measles and mumps. This combination vaccine follows a two-dose schedule (one shot at 12 months of age and a second shot at four to six years of age).

### **Where can I get more information on rubella?**

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health [www.nj.gov/health](http://www.nj.gov/health)
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Revised 01/13