



Rubella

What is rubella?

Rubella, also called German measles, is an infection that is caused by the rubella virus that is very contagious.

What are the symptoms of rubella?

The most common symptoms include a low-grade fever, rash, headache, malaise, runny nose, joint pain, conjunctivitis (infection in the eyes), and swollen glands. Symptoms can occur anytime from 14 to 21 days after exposure to the rubella virus. Rubella is usually a mild illness in children; up to half of infections occur without a rash. It is important to note that up to 50% of rubella infections are asymptomatic.

How do you get rubella?

Rubella is spread when a person comes in contact with an infected person. It is spread through droplets from the nose, mouth or throat when an infected person is coughing, sneezing or talking.

When is rubella contagious?

Rubella is highly contagious from 7 days before the rash to 4 days after the onset of rash. People diagnosed with rubella should be excluded from work, school, childcare facilities, and other group activities until 7 days after the appearance of the rash.

Is rubella dangerous?

Rubella usually causes only mild illness in children. However, it can have serious consequences for pregnant women. The most serious complication of a rubella infection results when it occurs during the first trimester of pregnancy. A pregnant woman who comes in contact with rubella during the first 5 months of pregnancy can pass the disease on to her fetus. In 8 of 10 cases of rubella in a pregnant woman, the fetus will get rubella before it is born. Rubella infection can affect all organs in the developing fetus and cause miscarriage, fetal death and congenital anomalies. Up to 90% of infants born to mothers who are infected in the first 11 weeks of gestation will develop a pattern of birth defects called Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS).

Is there treatment for rubella?

There is no specific treatment for rubella. However, individuals may require treatment or hospitalization if they develop serious complications from this infection.

How can I protect myself against rubella?

The best way to protect yourself against rubella is to receive the rubella vaccine. This vaccine is combined with the vaccines for measles and mumps, and is known as the MMR vaccine. MMR is a very safe vaccine. One dose provides immunity for 85% to 95% of individuals, and a second dose increases immunity levels to 99%. The vaccine is given to children at 12 months of age and again at 4 to 6 years of age.

How do I know if I am protected against rubella?

After being infected with rubella, immunity is generally lifelong. Immunization with 2 doses of the MMR vaccine provides almost 100% protection against rubella. If you are unsure of your immunization status, contact your health care provider.

What should I do if I develop the symptoms of rubella?

If you develop symptoms of rubella, you should be assessed by a physician, and notify the health care facility that you plan to visit so that staff are aware of your symptoms prior to your arrival. In the meantime, stay at home to avoid potentially exposing other people ("home isolation"). Rubella is diagnosed by a blood test and a nasopharyngeal swab.

For further information, visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca, or visit the websites listed below:

- Canadian Paediatric Society
http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/measles_mumps_rubella_vaccine
- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/publications/immune/mmr.aspx>

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