

RUBELLA (German Measles)

What is rubella?

Rubella (German measles) is a relatively mild, three day illness that seldom leads to complications in children. However, when pregnant women get the disease during their first few months of pregnancy, it can become serious. The rubella virus can cause babies to be born with defects such as cataracts, deafness, heart defects, and mental retardation, or the pregnancy can end in a miscarriage.

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. Children may sometimes have no symptoms, but adults may have temporary swelling and pain in the joints, a low-grade fever, headache, weakness, runny nose, and red eyes.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear 16 to 18 days after exposure, with a range of 14 to 23 days.

How is rubella spread?

The rubella virus is found in the noses and throats of infected people. Direct contact with these secretions or exposure to the cough or sneeze of an infected person can spread the disease.

How long can a person spread rubella?

People infected with rubella are contagious for about one week before the rash and at least four days after the rash.

How is rubella diagnosed?

Clinical diagnosis of rubella is often inaccurate, so it is best to check for rubella-specific antibodies in a person's blood.

Who is at risk of getting rubella?

Although rubella is most common among children and young adults, people of all ages can develop the disease. It has been estimated that one in five young adults is susceptible to rubella in the United States. Rubella is especially dangerous in women infected during the first few months of pregnancy because the virus can severely damage the fetus.

Is there a test for rubella immunity?

Blood tests are used to measure the amount of rubella antibodies in a person's blood. If a test shows rubella antibodies are present, a person is immune. If no rubella antibodies are present, a person is not protected against rubella.

Is rubella vaccine safe?

Rubella vaccine has an excellent record for safety. Swelling of the lymph glands in the neck or a rash could happen one to two weeks after getting the rubella vaccine. Mild pain or stiffness in the joints lasting three days may happen one to three weeks after getting the shot.

How can rubella be prevented?

1. By ensuring that children are vaccinated at appropriate ages.
2. People with rubella should be separated from non-immune people. This includes exclusion from public settings such as day-care centers, schools, or work.
3. Pregnant female contacts, in their first few months of pregnancy, should have their blood tested for infection or immunity, and should be advised accordingly.
4. Blood tests for rubella immunity should be done for all females before marriage, to identify susceptible women before pregnancy. Susceptible women should be immunized and advised to delay becoming pregnant for at least three months following immunization.
5. Both male and female health care workers should be immunized against rubella, unless they can provide evidence of immunization or disease.

What is the difference between rubella (German measles) and measles (rubeola)?

Rubella (German measles) is a mild, three day infection that seldom leads to complications in children. However, rubella may cause birth deformities in babies born to mothers who are infected during pregnancy. Measles (rubeola) is a serious disease and is sometimes called "hard," "red," or "seven day measles." Individuals infected with measles frequently suffer from ear infections and/or pneumonia.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal doctor
- Your local health department, listed in your telephone directory
- The Utah Department of Health, Immunization Program (801) 538-9450 or the Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191