



## RUBELLA (German measles)

### What is rubella?

Rubella (German measles) is a disease caused by the rubella virus. It is not the same as Measles (red measles or rubeola).

Since the introduction of a rubella immunization program for all infants in Canada in 1983, the average number of rubella cases decreased from about 5,300 (1971-1982) to fewer than 30 cases per year (1998-2004).

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms start 14 to 21 days after infection and include a slight fever, tiredness and swollen lymph glands behind the ears and back of the head, followed by a generalized rash. The rash consists of small red spots that appear on the face and then moves downwards from head to foot and lasts about three days. Not all people will get a rash. Complications from rubella can occur. Some people will have joint pain, which is more common in adolescents and adult women. Other uncommon complications of the illness include: inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) or problems with clotting of the blood (thrombocytopenia).

Rubella infection during early pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth or severe birth defects (such as deafness, eye problems, heart defects or liver, spleen and brain damage). This is called Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS) and occurs in one out of four babies born to women who have had rubella infections in the first three months of pregnancy.

### How is rubella spread?

Rubella is spread through close contact with an infected person. The virus can be found in the air after someone who is infected with rubella coughs or sneezes and can be breathed in. The virus can also be spread by direct contact with infected nasal or throat secretions through sharing food, drinks, cigarettes or kissing someone who has the virus. A person can spread rubella for four days after the rash develops.

### How is rubella diagnosed?

Rubella can be difficult to diagnose because there are many other viruses that cause similar illnesses with a fever and a rash. Definite diagnosis requires a blood test.

### Who is at risk of rubella infection?

People who have had rubella are immune for the rest of their lives. Anyone who is not vaccinated or has never had rubella is at risk.

### How can rubella be prevented?

The best way to protect against rubella is to be immunized. As part of the New Brunswick [Routine Immunization Schedule](#) measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine is given at 12 and 18 months of age.

Women of childbearing age who are not immunized or have not had rubella are eligible to receive publicly funded MMR vaccine. Women planning a pregnancy should have a blood test to check that they are protected against rubella. Rubella vaccine should not be given to pregnant women, and pregnancy should be avoided for one month following vaccination. It is safe for household contacts of pregnant women to receive the MMR vaccine.

A person with rubella should not attend daycare centres, school or work for four days after the rash appears. Covering nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, disposing soiled tissues, washing hands well and not sharing eating utensils, food or drinking cups will also help to reduce the spread of infection.

Pregnant women should avoid anyone with rubella and should see their health-care provider if they have been in contact with someone with these illnesses.

### How is rubella treated?

There is no specific treatment for rubella. Most people do not feel sick and recover from rubella without any complications. Symptoms such as fever may be treated with acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®). Drink plenty of fluids such as water, juice and soup and get plenty rest.

ASA or Aspirin® should **NOT** be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye 's syndrome with some virus infections.

### What is the public health response?

Health-care providers, hospitals and laboratories, schools and childcare centres must notify cases of rubella to Public Health. Statistics on the number of cases are tracked to monitor the impact of the immunization program, and to identify outbreaks.

### Further Information

For additional information, contact your health-care provider, [local Public Health office](#) or Tele-Care 811.

Useful websites:

- Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion <http://www.immunize.cpha.ca>
- Public Health Agency of Canada <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>
- Canadian Pediatric Society <http://www.cps.ca>

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