

Rubella

FACTSHEET

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What is Rubella?

Rubella is an infectious respiratory viral disease also known as 'German Measles'. Most cases are mild. Rubella infection is dangerous because of its ability to damage an unborn baby. Infection of a pregnant woman may result in miscarriage, stillbirth, or the birth of an infant with defects.

Who gets Rubella?

Prior to widespread immunization, rubella was common in childhood. It was considered a 'childhood disease' but it can be contracted at any age. Generally, adolescents, young adults, and inadequately immunized individuals makeup the majority of rubella cases in the United States.

What are the symptoms of Rubella?

Rubella is a mild illness that may have few or no symptoms. When symptoms occur they may include a rash, slight fever, joint aches, headache, runny nose, and reddened eyes. The lymph nodes just behind the ears and at the back of the neck may swell causing some soreness or pain. The rash, which may be itchy, first appears on the face and progresses from head to foot, lasting about three days. As many as half of all rubella cases occur without a rash.

How is Rubella spread?

Rubella is spread from person-to-person by direct contact with nasal or throat secretions of infected people or through the air from an infected person's coughing or sneezing.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear within 14 to 17 days, although they may occur as late as 21 days, after exposure.

Is a person with Rubella contagious?

A person with rubella is highly contagious for approximately one week before the rash appears to at least four days after the rash appears.

How is Rubella treated?

There is no specific treatment for rubella. However if you believe you have been exposed to rubella contact your healthcare provider, especially if you are pregnant. There are some medications that may lessen the severity of the disease.

Should a person with Rubella be excluded from work or school?

A person with rubella should remain at home for seven days after the rash appears.

Can you get Rubella more than once?

Once an individual has had Rubella, they generally develop lifelong immunity from the disease.

Can Rubella be prevented?

Rubella can be prevented by vaccination. This is a safe and highly effective vaccine. Rubella vaccine may be given on or after a child's first birthday, but it is recommended at 15 months of age. Measles vaccine may be given alone or in a one-shot combination vaccine that protects against measles, mumps, and rubella. A second dose of vaccine is given at school entry (4 to 6 years of age).

Want more information?

Information about Rubella and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call (202) 442-9371.

