

Health Office Fact Sheet



Rubella (German Measles)

What is Rubella?

Rubella — commonly known as German measles or 3-day measles — is an infection that primarily affects the skin and lymph nodes. It is caused by the rubella virus (not the same virus that causes measles), which is usually transmitted by droplets from the nose or throat that others breathe in. It can also pass through a pregnant woman's bloodstream to infect her unborn child.

It's a generally mild disease in children; the primary medical danger of rubella is the infection of pregnant women because it can cause congenital rubella syndrome in developing babies.

Before a vaccine against rubella became available in 1969, rubella epidemics occurred every 6-9 years, most often among kids 5 to 9 years old. Many cases of congenital rubella occurred as well. Thanks to immunization, there are far fewer cases of rubella and congenital rubella.

Most rubella infections today appear in young, non-immunized adults rather than in kids. In fact, experts estimate that 10% of young adults are currently susceptible to rubella, which could pose a danger to children they might have someday.

Signs and Symptoms

Rubella infection may begin with 1-2 days of mild fever (99-100° F/37.2–37.8° C) and swollen, tender lymph nodes, usually in the back of the neck or behind the ears. A rash then begins on the face and spreads downward. As it spreads, it usually clears on the face. This rash is often the first sign of illness that a parent notices. The rubella rash can look like many other viral rashes. It appears as either pink or light red spots, which may merge to form evenly coloured patches. The rash can itch and lasts up to 3 days. As the rash clears, the affected skin occasionally sheds in very fine flakes.

Other symptoms of rubella (these are more common in teens and adults) can include headache, loss of appetite, mild conjunctivitis (inflammation of the lining of the eyelids and eyeballs), a stuffy or runny nose, swollen lymph nodes in other parts of the body, and pain and swelling in the joints (especially in young women). Many people with rubella have few or no symptoms.

Rubella in Pregnancy

Rubella in a pregnant woman can cause congenital rubella syndrome, with potentially devastating consequences for the developing foetus. Children who are infected with rubella before birth are at risk for growth retardation; mental retardation; malformations of the heart and eyes; deafness; and liver, spleen, and bone marrow problems.

The following websites were used in the compilation of this fact sheet. They may also provide further information for you.

- <http://www.cdc.gov/Vaccines/vpd-vac/rubella/in-short-adult.htm>
- http://www.immunisation.nhs.uk/Vaccines/MMR/The_diseases/Rubella