



## Rubella

### What is rubella?

Rubella (German measles) is a disease caused by the rubella virus.

Rubella is usually a mild illness. Most people who have had rubella or the vaccine are protected against the virus for the rest of their lives.

Because of routine vaccination against rubella since 1970 in BC, rubella is now rarely reported.

**Rubella infection in pregnant women is dangerous.** If a pregnant woman is infected with rubella, she may have a miscarriage or stillbirth. The baby may be born with severe abnormalities, including deafness, eye problems, heart defects, 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 rubella infection in the first three months of pregnancy. CRS is rare because so many women are already immune to rubella infection. Cases still occur in Canada, however, in babies born to women who immigrate to Canada as rubella vaccination is not routine in many parts of the world.

### Rubella Vaccine

The measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine provides protection against rubella

and is part of the routine childhood vaccine program. For more information, see [HealthLink BC File #14a Measles, Mumps, Rubella \(MMR\) Vaccine](#).

Immunization against rubella helps prevent the disease and the spread of the disease to others.

A woman of childbearing age should make sure she is immune to rubella before getting pregnant. If she is not immune (has not had the disease or been immunized), she should get the vaccine, and then wait one month before getting pregnant.

A pregnant woman who does not know if she is immune to rubella will be offered a blood test for rubella immunity routinely as part of prenatal care. If she is not immune, she should be vaccinated after the pregnancy, preferably before leaving the hospital. Rubella-containing vaccine should not be given during pregnancy as a general precaution of avoiding live vaccines in pregnancy. If a woman receives rubella vaccine inadvertently during her pregnancy, this is not a reason to terminate the pregnancy. The vaccine has never been found to cause Congenital Rubella Syndrome.

## How is rubella spread?

Rubella spreads through close contact with an infected person with their respiratory secretions, such as through coughing or sneezing. Sharing food, drinks or cigarettes, or kissing someone who has the virus can also put you at risk.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include a rash, fever, joint aches, headache, discomfort, runny nose and irritated eyes. The lymph nodes located behind the ears and at the back of the neck may swell and feel painful.

The rash, which may be itchy, begins first on the face and then moves downwards from the head to the feet, and lasts about three days. About half of all rubella infections show no symptoms of a rash.

Symptoms can appear 14 to 21 days after a person is infected with the rubella virus. In most cases, symptoms appear 14 to 17 days after exposure to the virus.

A person with rubella can spread the virus to others from 7 days *before* to 4 days *after* the rash first appears. Children, teens, and adults with rubella should not attend daycare, school, or work or be around other people, especially pregnant women.

## Home Treatment

After seeing a doctor, the following home treatment tips may help you to be more comfortable while you rest and recover.

- Drink plenty of fluids such as water, juice and soup, especially if you have a fever.
- Get plenty of rest.
- For a fever or body aches, use acetaminophen (Tylenol®, Tempra®, Atasol®). ASA or Aspirin® should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm) or your local public health unit.

Click on [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca) or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.



ImmunizeBC



BC Centre for Disease Control  
AN AGENCY OF THE PROVINCIAL HEALTH SERVICES AUTHORITY