

## Rubella

### What is rubella?

Rubella (German measles) is a disease caused by a virus. Its symptoms include fever, rash, and swollen glands. Most cases are mild.

### Who gets rubella?

In populations that have not been immunized, rubella occurs most often in childhood. Now that most children in BC are immunized, rubella is not reported very often among children. However, teenage and adult infections still occur.

### How is rubella spread?

Rubella is spread by direct contact with nasal (nose) or throat secretions from infected individuals, including air-borne droplets spread by sneezing and coughing.

### What are the symptoms of rubella?

Rubella is usually a mild illness. Symptoms may include a rash, slight 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, causing some soreness or pain.

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

### How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms can appear from twelve to twenty-three days after a person is infected with the rubella virus. This is called the incubation

period. In most cases, symptoms appear sixteen to eighteen days after catching the virus.

### How long is a person able to spread rubella to others?

A person with rubella is contagious and can spread the disease to others, from seven days *before* to seven days *after* the rash first appears.

### If you have had rubella in the past, can you catch it again?

No. Most people who have had rubella once are protected against the virus for the rest of their lives.

### Is there a vaccine to prevent rubella infection?

Yes, a measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine is given to protect children against these diseases. Children should receive two doses of MMR – the first dose is given at twelve months of age, and the second is given at eighteen months of age. This vaccine is given at the same time as other childhood vaccines.

Immunizing children against rubella protects them from the disease, but also prevents the spread of the disease to others in the community, especially pregnant women.

For more information about the MMR vaccine, see BC HealthFile [#14a Measles, Mumps, Rubella \(MMR\) Vaccine](#).

## What if you're not immune to rubella?

Rubella infection in pregnant women is dangerous. If a pregnant woman is infected with rubella, she may have a miscarriage or stillbirth, or the baby may be born with severe abnormalities. These include deafness, cataracts, heart defects, liver and spleen damage, and mental disability. This is called the Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS). It occurs in one out of four babies born to women who have rubella infection in the first three months of pregnancy. Luckily, CRS is very rare because so many women are already immune to rubella infection.

## What can be done to prevent the spread of rubella?

It is important to maintain a high level of rubella immunization to prevent the spread of the disease in the community. Children, teens, and adults with rubella should not attend daycare, school, or work or be around other people, especially pregnant women.

## Who should get the rubella vaccine?

All children in BC should get the MMR vaccine at twelve months of age and again at eighteen months of age.

A woman of childbearing age should make sure she is immune to rubella so she won't get infected with the rubella virus during pregnancy. If she is *not* immune, that is if she has not had the disease or been immunized, she should get the vaccine.

A pregnant woman who does *not* know if she is immune to rubella should be tested during her pregnancy.

If she is *not* immune, rubella vaccine is recommended once the current pregnancy is completed. Women who are vaccinated are advised not to get pregnant for one month after receiving the vaccine. Rubella-containing vaccine should not be given to pregnant women. However, if a woman is immunized with a rubella-containing vaccine, and then is found to be pregnant, this is not a medical reason to end a pregnancy.



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