

RUBELLA (GERMAN MEASLES) AND PREGNANCY

What is rubella?

Rubella (German measles) is usually a mild viral infection. Symptoms include generalized skin rash, tiredness, headache, fever, and swollen glands in the area behind the ears and the neck (lymphadenopathy). It is estimated that 25% to 50% of persons infected with rubella may not have any symptoms.

What illness does rubella infection cause? Is this illness serious?

Rubella is usually a mild illness. However, there may be severe illness in adults who have not had the disease in the past or have not had the vaccine. Joint stiffness and/or joint pain may occur in up to 70% of adult women infected with rubella. Some of the other problems that may occur include a bleeding problem called thrombocytopenia and infection of the brain (encephalitis). If a woman gets rubella during her pregnancy, congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) may occur and result in miscarriage, stillbirth, and severe birth defects. A baby with CRS may have blindness, heart defects, deafness, and mental retardation.

I've been exposed to someone with rubella. How will this exposure affect my pregnancy?

It is recommended that all women be tested for rubella early in their pregnancy. An estimated 90% of young adults in the U.S. are immune to rubella (most likely through vaccination). If you are immune and have been exposed, there is no concern. However, about 25% of babies whose mothers get rubella during the first three months of her pregnancy are likely to develop a fetal infection and are likely to have congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) as described above. After the 20th week of pregnancy if a woman develops rubella, most likely there will not be any problems for either the mother or the unborn baby.

What should I do about this exposure?

If you know that you are immune to rubella (have had a blood test to show that you have antibodies to rubella), you do not need to be concerned about the exposure. If you are not immune to rubella and have been exposed to someone with rubella or have developed a rash illness that might be rubella, you should call your healthcare provider. They will do a blood test to see if you have become infected with the virus.

I have had a blood test for rubella. What do the results of the blood test show?

The blood test for rubella may show that you:

- Are immune (had rubella disease or vaccine in the past) and have no sign of recent infection. You are protected from rubella.
- Are not immune and have not yet been infected. You may wish to avoid anyone with rubella during your pregnancy.
- Have or had a recent infection. You should discuss what the risks are based on your stage of pregnancy with your healthcare provider.

If I'm infected or have been exposed, what do I need to do about my pregnancy?

Talk to your healthcare provider. Recommendations will depend on the stage of your pregnancy.

RUBELLA (GERMAN MEASLES) AND PREGNANCY

Is there a way I can keep from being infected with rubella during my pregnancy?

If you are not pregnant and not immune, all adults working with children should know their vaccine history or immune status. If you are not immune, you should be vaccinated with MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine.

When you are given the vaccine you should avoid becoming pregnant for at least one month after immunization. **Rubella vaccine should not be given to pregnant women.**

If you are pregnant, you should receive MMR vaccine after your baby is delivered.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.