



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Rubella (German measles)

What is rubella?

Rubella is an illness caused by a virus. The symptoms are like measles and scarlet fever, but do not last as long. The disease is often mild for children and adults.

Rubella can cause serious damage to an unborn baby, including deafness, heart defects, and brain defects. In some cases, rubella may cause miscarriage or stillbirth. No cases of rubella have been reported in Indiana since 1999.

How is rubella spread?

Rubella is spread through indirect or direct contact with an infected person's nose or throat droplets. It can be spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People with rubella can spread it for up to 7 days after the rash starts. Anyone with rubella should stay home during that time to prevent giving the illness to others.

Who is at risk for rubella?

People who have not received at least one dose of rubella vaccine (usually MMR, the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine) are at risk for rubella. The risk for rubella in the United States is low, but it is still common in other parts of the world. Anyone traveling outside the United States or exposed to foreign visitors is at higher risk for rubella.

How do I know if I have rubella?

See your doctor right away. If you have been exposed to someone with rubella or you have symptoms that match those described above, your doctor may test you for rubella. Many other diseases cause rash illnesses. If you have received your shot for rubella, it is not likely that you have the disease.

What are the symptoms of rubella?

Symptoms last about 3-5 days and include:

- Slight fever
- Sore throat
- A rash that starts on the face and spreads quickly to the rest of the body
- Swelling in the neck lymph nodes
- Joint pain or joint swelling

Symptoms often appear 14-18 after exposure to the virus.

How is rubella treated?

Since rubella is caused by a virus, antibiotics do not cure rubella. There are no medicines to treat rubella. Treatment focuses on easing the symptoms of the illness.

How can rubella be prevented?

The MMR vaccine is safe and very good at preventing rubella. Most schools and some child-care centers require proof of vaccination before entry. If you have not had rubella and have no record of getting the vaccine, see your doctor. Your doctor can decide if you need a dose of vaccine. It is very important for women who may become pregnant to have protection from rubella.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/rubella/in-short-adult.htm>.

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