

Rubella and Pregnancy

Rubella—also called German measles—is a mild illness caused by a virus. Rubella spreads from person to person through saliva, sneezing and coughing from an infected person.

Symptoms:

Rubella starts with mild flu-like symptoms followed by a rash. About half of people with rubella have no symptoms.

If you get rubella when you're pregnant it can cause serious problems for your baby. Rubella in pregnancy is very rare in Canada because most women were vaccinated with the MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine or had the illness in childhood but you need to know whether you're immune (protected).

Rubella and pregnancy: The risk

Having rubella during pregnancy increases the risk of Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS). It may cause a baby to be born with serious birth defects, including heart problems, vision and hearing problems, and mental disability.

The risk of CRS is highest early in a pregnancy.

- If you get rubella in the first 10 weeks of your pregnancy, the chance may be as high as 90 per cent that the fetus will develop CRS. Miscarriage is also common.
- If you get rubella after 20 weeks, CRS is rare.

The best way to protect your baby is to make sure you are immune to rubella.

How do I know if I'm immune (protected)?

A simple blood test can tell whether or not you are immune to rubella. It is best to know if you are protected before you get pregnant. Talk to your health care provider about getting tested.

If you are immune to rubella, you are considered protected from rubella through your pregnancy.

If you are not immune to rubella, to reduce the risk of infection, you should:

Before pregnancy – get the MMR vaccine. Wait one month before getting pregnant after the shot.

During pregnancy – the MMR vaccine is not given during pregnancy.

There are steps you can take to protect yourself:

- Stay away from anyone who may have been exposed to rubella
- Stay away from anyone with a rash
- Don't share food, drinks, utensils, lipstick, cigarettes, etc.
- Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently
- Make sure that your partner, children and others around you are protected from rubella
- Tell your health care provider if you have been in contact with anyone that has rubella

After pregnancy – Get the MMR vaccination to protect your newborn and any future pregnancies.

If you have any questions or concerns, and would like to speak to a health professional call 519-663-5317 ext. 2330 or go to www.healthunit.com

Reference:

Heymann, D. L. (ed.). (2015) Control of Communicable Diseases Manual (20th ed.) Washington, DC: American Public Health Association

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