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FACT SHEET

Rubella

Rubella sometimes called German Measles or the Three Day Measles is a viral disease that is contagious. Rubella was eliminated from the United States in 2004 but can still be brought into the United States by travelers who get infected in other countries. During the last major rubella epidemic in the United States from 1964 to 1965, an estimated 12.5 million people got rubella, 11,000 pregnant women lost their babies, 2,100 newborns died, and 20,000 babies were born with congenital rubella syndrome (CRS). After the development of the vaccine in 1969 and vaccine campaigns the number of people infected with the disease helped with a dramatic decline with infections.

<https://www.cdc.gov/rubella/about/index.html>

Cause:

The virus causes rubella is the *rubivirus* and is different than the measles virus. It is spread primarily through coughing and sneezing. It is recognizable by the well documented rash that spreads over most of the body.

Symptoms:

A red rash is typically the first sign. The rash generally first appears on the face and then spreads to the rest of the body, and lasts about three days. Other symptoms that may occur 1 to 5 days before the rash appears include:

- a low-grade fever
- headache
- mild pink eye (redness or swelling of the white of the eye)
- general discomfort
- swollen and enlarged lymph nodes
- cough
- runny nose

Most adults who get rubella usually have a mild illness, with low-grade fever, sore throat, and a rash that starts on the face and spreads to the rest of the body.

About 25 to 50% of people infected with rubella are asymptomatic.

Spread:

Rubella is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. A pregnant woman can pass it to her developing baby and cause serious harm.

Some individuals never develop a rash or have any symptoms.

Incubation: The average incubation period of rubella virus is 17 days, with a range of 12 to 23 days.

Contagious Period: Individuals who are infected with rubella are most contagious when the rash is erupting, but they can be contagious from 7 days before to 7 days after the rash appears.

Precautions: Anyone who is under immunized or unimmunized is at risk for getting the disease. Those who are immune compromised are at also at greater risk. Rubella is especially dangerous for a pregnant woman. If she gets rubella, she can have a miscarriage, or her baby could be born with certain birth defects.
<https://www.cdc.gov/rubella/pregnancy.html>

Prevention: The best way to protect against rubella is to get the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine (MMR vaccine). Doctors recommend that all children get the MMR vaccine. Anyone who has not received 2 doses of a measles-containing vaccine (preferably MMR vaccine) should be vaccinated. Pregnant women should not receive the vaccine. Pregnancy should be avoided for 4 weeks after vaccination with MMR. The use of good coughing/handwashing techniques helps in controlling illnesses. Persons who may have been exposed should be educated on the signs and symptoms of measles disease and should seek medical attention as soon as any of these symptoms begin.
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/index.html>
<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/measles.pdf>

Diagnosis and Treatment: Healthcare providers should consider rubella in unvaccinated patients with febrile rash illness and other rubella symptoms, especially if the person recently traveled internationally or was exposed to a person with febrile rash illness. If suspicious of rubella, promptly isolate the individual and report to the local health department. Collect throat (best source), nasal, or urine specimens for viral detection by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing and molecular typing, and blood for serologic testing.
<https://www.cdc.gov/rubella/lab/index.html>