

Fact Sheet

Rubella

What is rubella disease?

Rubella (also called German measles) is a contagious disease caused by a virus. Rubella generally causes mild illness in children, but can be serious for pregnant women who are not immune.

What are the symptoms?

Rubella is usually a mild disease and often there are no symptoms, especially in children. Adults may have symptoms about 2 to 3 weeks after contact with an infected person. Symptoms may include:

- Low fever.
- A mild rash that lasts 1 to 3 days, starting on the face and spreading to the rest of the body.
- Aches in the joints.
- Swollen glands behind the ears and the back of the neck.

Rubella symptoms are the same for pregnant women but the risks are higher. Rubella disease during pregnancy can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, or the baby may have defects (called congenital rubella). The risk of congenital rubella is higher during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

How is it spread?

Rubella spreads from person to person by drops of fluid from the nose and throat of someone who has the disease (like when they cough or sneeze). People with rubella can spread the infection from 7 days before to at least 4 days after the rash appears.

Who is at risk?

Anyone born in or after 1970, is not vaccinated, and has never had rubella infection is at risk. People born before 1970 likely had rubella when they were young and are protected.

What is the treatment?

There is no treatment for rubella and most people can get better at home. People who get seriously sick should contact their health care provider.

How can rubella be prevented?

- Women who plan to become pregnant should be tested for rubella and immunized if they are at risk.
- Every child in Nunavut should get the diphtheria vaccine as part of the routine immunization schedule.
- For those born in or after 1970, vaccination is the best way to prevent rubella. Speak with your health care provider to make sure you and your family have completed your rubella vaccination.
- Hand washing, especially after coughing and sneezing, and before and after caring for a sick person, will help prevent the spread of germs.
- Try not to share food, drinks, cigarettes or eating utensils, and toothbrushes.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your elbow.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Make sure you have all your immunizations before you travel outside of Canada.