



Rubella

What is rubella?

Rubella (also called German measles) is a contagious illness caused by a virus.

What are the symptoms?

Rubella illness is usually mild. Symptoms begin 16 to 18 days after being exposed. Common symptoms include a slight fever, swelling of the lymph glands (often in the back of the neck), joint pain, and a rash that usually lasts three days. About half of all people who get the disease do not have symptoms.



Patient with a generalized rash on the abdomen caused by rubella

Is rubella dangerous?

Rubella is usually a mild disease; however, it is dangerous if a woman gets it while she is pregnant. Rubella can cause birth defects such as deafness, blindness, heart problems, mental retardation, or bone problems in babies before they are born. This risk is greatest in the first trimester. Rubella can also cause miscarriages or fetal death. Because of this, all women who want to have children should have their blood tested to make sure that they are immune to rubella.

How is rubella spread?

The rubella virus is found in the noses and throats of infected people. Direct contact with nose/throat secretions or exposure to the cough or sneeze of an infected person can spread the disease. People infected with rubella are contagious from 7 days before until 7 days after onset of the rash.

Who gets rubella?

Anyone who has never had rubella illness or has never been vaccinated can get rubella. Babies younger than 12 months old are at higher risk because they cannot be vaccinated.

How is rubella diagnosed?

Rubella can look like other diseases that cause a rash. If you suspect you or your child has rubella, call your or your child's health care provider. The health care provider will evaluate and determine if you or your child have rubella. All cases of rubella (suspect or confirmed) must be reported by the health care provider to the Boston Public Health Commission (617-534-5611).

How can I prevent rubella?

Protect your children by having them vaccinated against rubella. The rubella vaccine is part of the MMR vaccine, which protects against mumps and measles as well as rubella. MMR vaccine is usually given to children at 12-15 months of age and again at 4-6 years old. Adults and older children who are not immune should get the MMR vaccine. In Massachusetts, proof of immunization to MMR is required for school attendance, including college. Other groups, particularly healthcare workers, should also be immune to rubella. Women who plan to have children and who are not immune should get the MMR vaccine at least 1 month before getting pregnant.

Continued

Is MMR vaccine safe?

Yes, it is safe for most people. People sometimes may experience a fever, rash, or swelling of the lymph glands in the neck one to two weeks after getting the MMR vaccine. Allergic reactions or other side effects can occur, but are rare.

Who should not get MMR vaccine?

People who have serious allergies to gelatin, the drug neomycin, or a previous dose of the vaccine should not get the MMR vaccine. Pregnant women should not get MMR vaccine until after they deliver their babies. People with cancer, HIV, or other problems that weaken the immune system should check with their healthcare provider before being vaccinated. People who have recently had a blood transfusion or were given other blood products should check with their health care provider before being vaccinated. People with high fevers should not be vaccinated until after the fever and other symptoms are gone.

