

Facts About Rubella for Adults

What is rubella?

Rubella, also called German measles, is caused by a virus that is spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Rubella is also spread by direct contact with the nasal or throat secretions of an infected person. If a pregnant woman gets rubella during pregnancy, particularly during the first 3 months, her baby is at risk of having serious birth defects.

Prevention

There is a safe and effective vaccine to protect against rubella. The vaccine is usually given to adults as part of a combination vaccine, called the MMR vaccine, that protects against measles, mumps and rubella. There is also a vaccine that protects against rubella only.

Symptoms

Symptoms of rubella may include a rash, slight fever, aching joints, and reddened eyes. The rash first appears on the face and spreads from head to toe. The lymph nodes just behind the ears and at the back of the neck may swell, causing soreness and pain. Many people with rubella have few or no symptoms, and up to half of the people who have the disease may not get a rash. In most cases of rubella, symptoms appear within 16 to 18 days after exposure.

Who should get MMR vaccine?

- ◆ Adults born in 1957 or later including non-pregnant women of childbearing age who do not have a medical contraindication should receive at least one dose of the MMR vaccine, unless they have documentation of vaccination with at least one dose of measles-, rubella-, and mumps-containing vaccine or other acceptable evidence of immunity to these three diseases.
- ◆ College and university students, health care personnel, child care workers such as teachers and day care personnel, and international travelers are at increased risk for rubella and these persons should receive two doses of the MMR vaccine or have other acceptable evidence of immunity, regardless of age, in order to ensure adequate protection.

Vaccine Safety

The rubella vaccine and the combined MMR vaccine are very safe. The most common side effect is burning or stinging at the injection site. Other common side effects include fever, rash, headache and general weakness. Another adverse event that are associated with the rubella component of MM R vaccine is joint symptoms in adult women. As with any medicine, there are very small risks that serious problems could occur after getting the vaccine. However, the potential risks associated with rubella are much greater than the potential risks associated with the rubella vaccine.

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- FACT:** Rubella can be prevented with a safe, effective vaccine.
- FACT:** Rubella is contagious from 7 days before until 5 to 7 days after the rash appears.
- FACT:** In most cases of rubella, symptoms appear within 12 to 23 days, and 20% to 50% of cases may not exhibit symptoms.
- FACT:** If a pregnant woman gets rubella during the first 3 months of pregnancy, her baby has a good chance of having serious birth defects such as deafness, cataracts, heart defects, liver and spleen damage, and mental retardation
- FACT:** During 2001-2008, 79% of all reported cases of rubella occurred among people 15 years of age and older.
- FACT:** As many as 7 million women of childbearing age are susceptible to rubella.
- FACT:** Up to 7 % of young adults are susceptible to the rubella virus.