

# Rubella (German Measles)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is rubella?

Rubella is a contagious disease caused by a virus. Rubella is sometimes called “German measles,” but it is caused by a different virus than measles. Before the rubella vaccine became available, rubella was a common childhood disease. It is usually a mild disease but is very dangerous during pregnancy and for developing babies.

### Who gets rubella?

Anyone who has not already had rubella or has not received the rubella vaccine can get the disease. There are still cases of rubella around the world where populations are not vaccinated against the disease.

### How do people get rubella?

When an infected person coughs or sneezes, the virus is released into the air and enters another person’s body through the nose or throat. Rubella can be contagious seven days before and seven days after the rash appears.

### What are the symptoms of rubella?

Symptoms of rubella are often mild, and up to half of people infected with rubella virus have no symptoms at all, but they can still spread it to others. Symptoms include:

- Low-grade fever
- Headache
- Mild pink eye (redness or swelling of the white of the eye)
- General discomfort
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Sore throat
- Rash that usually first appears on the face and spreads to the rest of the body

### Are there complications with a rubella virus infection?

Rubella is usually a mild disease, but can lead to complications and death. Up to 70% of adult women may experience arthritis as a rubella complication. In rare cases, rubella can cause serious problems, including brain infections and bleeding problems.

The most serious danger of rubella is to pregnant women and the developing fetus. If a woman gets infected with rubella during pregnancy, the rubella virus can be passed to the baby and cause a miscarriage, stillbirth, or serious birth defects in a developing baby. These birth defects include heart problems, loss of hearing and eyesight, intellectual disability, and liver or spleen damage. This is called congenital rubella syndrome.

Women of childbearing age should check with their health care providers to make sure they are protected. A blood test can tell whether or not a person has protection for rubella. Pregnant women who have had rubella or a rubella vaccination are protected.

**How is rubella diagnosed?**

A health care provider will observe symptoms and will perform lab testing to find out if a person is infected with rubella.

**What is the treatment for rubella?**

There is no cure for rubella, only supportive treatment (bed rest, fluids and fever reduction). Most patients will recover on their own.

**How can rubella be prevented?**

Rubella is a vaccine preventable disease. Getting vaccinated against rubella will protect people from getting the disease. The rubella vaccine is given in combination with the vaccines for measles and mumps. This combination vaccine follows a two-dose schedule (one shot at 12 months of age and a second shot at four to six years of age).

**Where can I get more information on rubella?**

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department [localhealth.nj.gov](http://localhealth.nj.gov)
- NJ Department of Health [nj.gov/health](http://nj.gov/health)
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention [cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/rubella/index.html](http://cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/rubella/index.html)

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