

German Measles (Rubella)

Definition

Rubella is a contagious viral infection best known for its distinctive red rash. It's also called German measles. Rubella isn't the same as measles, but the two illnesses share some signs and symptoms, such as a red rash. Rubella is caused by a different virus than measles, and rubella isn't as infectious or as severe as measles. The Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR) vaccine is safe and highly effective in preventing rubella. The vaccine provides lifelong protection against rubella. The virus can cause severe birth defects in pregnant women who have not been vaccinated or had the disease before.

Symptoms

Signs and symptoms generally appear between two and three weeks after exposure to the virus. In children, rubella is usually mild, with few noticeable symptoms. For children who do have symptoms, a red rash is typically the first sign. The rash generally appears on the face and quickly spreads to the trunk and then the arms and legs, before disappearing in the same order, lasting about three days. Other symptoms that may occur one to five days before the rash appears include:

- Mild fever
- Headache
- Red, itchy eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Runny nose
- Enlarged, tender lymph nodes at the base of the skull, the back of the neck and behind the ears
- Aching joints, especially in young women

Transmission

Rubella spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can also spread by direct contact with infected mucus from the nose and throat. Also, if a woman is infected with rubella while pregnant, she can pass it to her developing baby and cause serious harm. A person with rubella may spread the disease to others up to one week before the rash appears and remain contagious up to seven days after. However, 25% to 50% of people infected with rubella do not develop a rash or have any symptoms, but they still spread it to others.

Treatment

- Bed rest
- Acetaminophen (Panadol, others) for relief from fever and pain