

RUBELLA

What is it?

Rubella, also known as German measles, is a viral infection with skin manifestations that is relatively mild in most people. It can cause major birth defects in a fetus if a pregnant woman contracts the disease, especially in the first trimester (often before a woman even knows she is pregnant). It is most often found in children and immunizations have drastically decreased the number of cases each year in the U.S. It spreads via direct contact with an infected person or respiratory droplets with the period of contagion being approximately 7 days before to 5 days after a rash appears.

Signs and symptoms:

- * Sometimes no symptoms are present or are unapparent.
- * Rash that lasts only one or two days, appearing on the second or third day. It usually starts on the face, spreading to chest, abdomen, and then the extremities. Small lesions appear first and may coalesce. A rash may be completely absent.
- * Fever.
- * Fatigue.
- * Muscle aches and stiffness.
- * Swollen lymph nodes behind ears and on neck.
- * Sore throat.
- * Joint pain in adults, more common in women, appearing 2-3 days after rash.
- * Rarely, the disease progresses to encephalitis, thrombocytopenia, agranulocytosis or splenomegaly.

Immunization and Prevention:

- * Immunize children against rubella at 12-15 months of age. Booster at ages 5 or 6 or ages 11 to 15.
- * Women who are thinking of having children, or with whom pregnancy is a possibility, should be immunized and then delay starting a family for three months after immunization. Your doctor can do a blood test to check for adequate antibodies against rubella if you can't remember contracting the disease or getting an immunization.
- * Even if a woman is pregnant, if she is exposed to rubella without having a vaccination or contracting the disease in the past, she can receive a gamma globulin injection which may decrease the risk of contracting rubella or lessen its severity.
- * There are people who should not receive a vaccination against rubella. They include people who have cancer, are receiving radiation therapy, are on corticosteroids or anti-cancer agents or have an illness with fever.

Treatment:

- * Diagnosis is via clinical symptoms or by a culture of throat, blood, urine or spinal fluid. Isolation of the virus is difficult and requires special techniques.

- * Treatment is symptomatic.
- * Rest and drink lots of fluids.
- * If you have exposed a pregnant women to rubella, let her know immediately! She needs to visit her doctor. Remember, the infectious period is approximately one week before symptoms appear and up to one week after the rash goes away.
- * To relieve fever, use acetaminophen, ibuprofen or any non-prescription drug like these. Ask your physician what is preferred.
- * **DO NOT GIVE ASPIRIN TO CHILDREN.** Aspirin use in children has been linked to a form of encephalitis called Reye's syndrome.

CALL OUR OFFICE IF:

- * Your symptoms worsen.
- * You have a high fever, red eyes, cough or shortness of breath.
- * You feel very tired, have a severe headache or have a convulsion.
- * Abnormal bleeding occurs after the illness has subsided - from the nose, gums, uterus or scattered on the skin.