

## About rubella

### What is Rubella?

Rubella, or German measles, is a mild disease caused by a virus. If you get it you may feel unwell, with swollen glands and a slight temperature or sore throat. You may develop a rash, usually behind the ears and on the face and neck, but equally some people have rubella and don't develop a rash, or any of the other symptoms.

Rubella used to be common in childhood with most children catching it over the winter. It is spread by droplets in the air from the coughs and sneezes of an infected person.

According to the Department of Health's publication "Immunisation against infectious diseases", the incubation period (the time that someone has the virus in their system before they develop symptoms) is 14-21 days with the majority of affected individuals developing a rash 14-17 days after exposure. Individuals are then infectious from one week before the symptoms appear to four days after the rash starts.

Remember though that some people don't have the symptoms so many never know that they are infectious and are passing the disease on to others. Rubella can seriously affect pregnant women, damaging their unborn child - particularly the developing sight, hearing, heart and brain.

The NHS Direct website has more information about rubella - [NHS Choices: Rubella](#).

### What is Congenital Rubella Syndrome?

When a pregnant woman catches rubella she passes the infection on to her foetus and it damages the organs as they develop.

Infection in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy causes 90% of infants to be damaged - typically their heart, eyes, ears and brain, often in combination. In the next six weeks a third of infants are affected, usually but not always restricted to hearing loss. Later infection is rarely associated with damage, and is referred to as congenital rubella infection.

Damage that congenital rubella syndrome causes include:

- A hearing loss in one or both ears. This can be present at birth, be progressive or of late onset.
- Cataracts in one or both eyes and some other, rarer eye conditions. Sight may deteriorate with age.
- Heart problems that require hospital treatment at birth and affect the infant throughout life.
- The way the brain and nervous system develop.

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