

## Who is at risk of catching rubella?

In the UK today there is very little wild rubella virus circulating, largely due to the success of the vaccination programme. However, we can't be complacent – there are localised outbreaks and lower than desired vaccination rates over a 10 year period mean that we risk seeing rubella return if we are not careful. What we do know is that if there are significant outbreaks of rubella in this country, as we saw in 1996, then we will see women who are pregnant pass on the infection to their unborn child, who in turn may be born with multiple disabilities.

Research shows that on average between 1.5% and 4% of women during their first pregnancy are susceptible to rubella; the figures are lower for subsequent pregnancies – between 0.5% and 1.5%<sup>1</sup>. These will be women who have not been immunised or infected in the past. There is evidence that susceptibility to rubella is higher in some minority ethnic groups. For example a study in the North Thames area showed that 15% of women of Sri Lankan origin were susceptible to rubella.

In recent years, of all the cases where a child is born damaged because of rubella:

- One third were born to women who acquired the rubella infection abroad, early in pregnancy (mostly in their country of origin)
- One third were born to women who were born abroad but who acquired the rubella infection in the UK (most within two years of arrival)
- One third were born to women who were born in the UK and acquired the rubella infection in the UK.

Sense believes that health professionals and others should pay particular attention to women who may be at risk of catching rubella by checking their susceptibility and advising immunisation where necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> Vyse et al, Epidemiol Rev 2002