



Rubella

Rubella, also known as German measles, is still a problem in our community. Outbreaks of the disease continue to occur regularly.

What is rubella?

Rubella is generally a mild childhood disease, but it can also infect teenagers and adults. It is highly contagious. It spreads in the tiny droplets of moisture emitted by coughing and sneezing. After an exposure, symptoms may involve a slight fever, swollen glands and joint pain followed by a rash. It is also possible to become infected without obvious symptoms.

Why is rubella a problem?

The unborn child is at greatest risk from rubella. It can have devastating effects on the baby's development in the womb. This type of



rubella is called congenital rubella. If the mother contracts rubella in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy, her unborn child can die. Or, the child can be born with serious birth defects such as:

- heart defects
- blindness
- deafness
- mental retardation.

It is particularly serious because in some cases damage might be caused

to the unborn child before the mother even knows she is pregnant.

How do we prevent rubella?

There are two ways to protect expectant mothers and their babies from rubella:

- To make sure all women are immunised before they become pregnant.*
- To immunise all children and teenagers to stop the spread of the disease.*

The measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine is given at 12 months of age and again between 10 and 16 years. This vaccine also provides protection from mumps and measles infection. The NSW Health Department provides a school-based service that offers the MMR vaccine to boys and girls at 10 to 16 years of age.

Are you planning a baby?

Women who intend to become pregnant should have a blood test for rubella, as the immunisation they received as a

teenager may need boosting. If they receive a booster vaccination, they should wait at least two months before conceiving.

Is the MMR vaccine safe?

Yes. The vaccine has minimal side effects. It contains small amounts of measles, mumps and rubella viruses that have been weakened so they help the body to become immune. They do not result in the disease. The most common reaction may be a slight fever and feeling unwell for a short time. Occasionally a rash may occur, but it is not infectious.

The risk of complications after catching one of these diseases is far greater than any risks from the vaccines.

Is the MMR vaccine effective?

Yes. The vaccine provides immunity to rubella in more than 95% of people vaccinated. Since immunisation programs against rubella began, there has been a marked reduction in children affected by congenital rubella.

It is up to all of us in the community to protect unborn children from the terrible damage that this virus can cause.

For more information on rubella, talk to your family doctor on your next visit.

