

# Rubella (German measles)



## What is rubella?

Rubella, also called German measles or 3-day measles, is a disease caused by the rubella virus. Rubella is generally a mild illness that does not result in long-term problems although it can cause congenital rubella syndrome if acquired during pregnancy (leading to damage to the baby including deafness, cataracts and brain damage).

Rubella vaccine is part of the UK **Routine childhood immunisation schedule**. The MMR vaccine protects 90% of immunised people from getting this disease. Rubella is now a very rare disease in school aged children and most commonly affects men in their 20s.

## What causes rubella?

The rubella virus is most often spread through droplets of fluid from the **mucous membranes** of an infected person. These droplets can be spread by:

- Coughing, sneezing, talking
- Sharing food and drinks.
- Touching a surface contaminated with the droplets and then touching eyes, nose, or mouth before washing hands.
- Less commonly, the virus can be acquired through contact with infected blood if it gets on broken skin or on hands which are not then washed immediately.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of rubella include:

- Mild fever
- Swollen glands (especially behind the ear and at the back of the head),
- Skin rash that starts on the face and spreads to the neck, chest and the rest of the body.
- Older children and teenagers may have fever, eye pain, sore throat, and body aches. They may or may not develop a rash.
- Up to 50% of individuals with rubella may not develop any symptoms.

## Is it infectious?

Yes, rubella is most contagious a few days before the rash develops until five to seven days after it appears. It can take between 14 and 21 days for an individual to develop symptoms after they have been infected with the virus.

## How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment for rubella but symptoms can be managed as necessary.

Paracetamol type analgesia can be given to children and adults for fever. Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than 16yrs because of the possible link to kidney problems

### Can spread be prevented?

Spread is by the respiratory route so good respiratory hygiene should be practiced as standard in the school.

- Good respiratory hygiene should be encouraged (covering noses and mouths with disposable tissues when coughing or sneezing and discarding it after use).
- Good hand hygiene should also be encouraged (after using the toilet and before eating as per usual but also after coughing, sneezing or assisting others with respiratory hygiene).
- Individuals with rubella should be excluded from school as soon as symptoms develop until six days after the onset of the rash.
- Encourage all parents to ensure their children are up to date with their immunisations and that they have had two MMR vaccinations in line with the UK **Routine childhood immunisation schedule**. Staff who are unsure about their vaccination history can speak to their Practice Nurse.

### Pregnancy and rubella

Advise any members of staff who may be pregnant that they will need to see their GP or midwife as soon as possible following exposure (even if they are well). Generally, rubella causes only mild illness with no long-term problems. However, if an individual is pregnant and become infected with the rubella virus, this can have serious effects on their baby's development.

More information on rubella can be found in chapter nine of the **Health protection in schools and childcare facilities** guidance.