



Central Michigan District Health Department

Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities



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Rubella

What is Rubella?

Rubella is a contagious disease caused by a virus. It is also called “German measles,” but it is caused by a different virus than measles. Rubella was eliminated from the United States in 2004. Rubella elimination is defined as the absence of continuous disease transmission for 12 months or more in a specific geographic area.

Before the rubella vaccination program started in 1969, rubella was a common and widespread infection in the United States. During the last major rubella epidemic in the United States from 1964 to 1965, an estimated 12.5 million people got rubella, 11,000 pregnant women lost their babies, 2,100 newborns died, and 20,000 babies were born with congenital rubella syndrome (CRS). Once the vaccine became widely used, the number of people infected with rubella in the United States dropped dramatically.

What are the signs and symptoms of Rubella?

Rubella symptoms are typically mild and may include:

- A red rash starting on the face and spreading down the body that lasts about three days

Other symptoms that may occur 1 to 5 days before the rash appears include:

- Low grade fever
- Headache
- Redness or swelling of the white of the eye
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Swelling of the lymph glands in the neck

Most adults who get rubella usually have mild illness, with low-grade fever, sore throat and a rash that starts on the face and spreads to the rest of the body. These signs may be so slight that a person may not know that they have contracted the virus.

The most serious complication from rubella infection is the harm it can cause a pregnant woman’s developing baby. Serious birth defects include:

- Heart problems
- Loss of hearing and eyesight
- Intellectual disability
- Liver or spleen damage
- Death

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How is it spread?

Rubella spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes and those droplets get into another person's eyes, nose, or mouth. A woman can be infected with rubella while pregnant and pass the virus on to her unborn baby.

What is the treatment?

The virus needs to run its course. There is no specific treatment for rubella. Manage the signs and symptoms.

How can Rubella be prevented?

Keeping the public aware of the routine vaccine recommendations for both children and adults, will help stop to keep rubella eliminated in the United States.