

What is rubella?

Rubella, commonly called German measles, is a vaccine-preventable rash illness caused by the rubella virus. It is usually a mild disease, but can be severe in some cases. Rubella during pregnancy (congenital rubella) can cause severe complications to the fetus, such as birth defects, miscarriage, or fetal death.

Who is at risk for rubella?

Anyone who has not been vaccinated or has not previously had the disease is at risk.

What are the symptoms of rubella?

Many people have no signs or symptoms, but if they do, they consist of a pink or red rash appearing first on the face, then spreading downward over the body. They may also have swollen glands behind the ears, a slight fever, and joint aches and/or pain (this is more common in adults).

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms of rubella can appear anywhere from 14 to 21 days from the date of infection, but usually occur within 16 to 18 days.

How is rubella spread?

Rubella is spread by droplets from either sneezing or coughing. The germs that cause rubella live in the nose, mouth and throat, and are sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks. Other people nearby can then inhale the germs. Touching a tissue or sharing a cup used by someone with rubella also can spread the disease.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

A person is able to spread rubella anywhere from seven days before to seven days after the rash begins.

How is a person diagnosed?

A health care provider can diagnose rubella. A laboratory test is needed to confirm the diagnosis.

What is the treatment?

There is no treatment for rubella. Health-care providers will give supportive care if necessary.

Does past infection make a person immune?

Yes. Past infection or past vaccination leads to lifelong immunity.

Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have rubella?

Yes. Rubella is a highly contagious disease. In outbreak situations, exposed children who have not been immunized should be excluded. Also, if the children have exemptions for not being immunized, they should be excluded until the North Dakota Department of Health determines it is safe for them to return.

What can be done to prevent the spread of rubella disease?

1. All children between 12 and 15 months of age should be vaccinated with the first dose of MMR (measles, mumps and rubella vaccine). A booster dose of MMR is recommended at 4 to 6 years of age. A combination vaccine is also available (MMRV), which protects against measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox. Children are required to be age-appropriately immunized against rubella in order to attend early childhood facilities, schools, and colleges in North Dakota.
2. The immunization status of all children and staff at the school or early childhood facility should be reviewed.
3. During rubella outbreaks, exposed children and staff who have not been immunized should be excluded until they are vaccinated, or if they refuse, they should continue to be excluded until the North Dakota Department of Health determines it is safe for them to return. The vaccine may provide some protection if given after exposure.
4. Routine hand washing also helps prevent the spread of rubella.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/disease or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resource:

American Academy of Pediatrics. [Rubella]. In: Kimberlin DW, Brady MT, Jackson MA, Long SS, eds. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2015: 688-695.