

# Fact Sheet: Rubella

## What is Rubella?

Rubella, also known as German measles or three-day measles, is a contagious viral infection. Rubella virus lives in the respiratory secretions of infected persons and is usually spread to others through sneezing or coughing. Complications from Rubella are not common but tend to occur mostly in adults. Rubella infection during pregnancy may cause birth defects. If acquired by a pregnant woman, complications such as deafness, cataracts, heart defects, mental retardation, and liver and spleen damage can occur. There is at least a 20% chance of damage to the fetus if a woman is infected early in pregnancy.

## Signs and Symptoms

- Low-grade fever
- Cough and runny nose
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Swelling of the lymph glands (especially those in the back of the neck).
- Mild pink eye
- A red rash lasting up to three days
- Pain and Swelling in the joints

The red rash typically appears on the face and then spreads to the rest of the body. The symptoms of rubella occur usually two weeks after exposure. About 25%-50% of people infected with rubella do not develop a rash or have any symptoms

## How is it spread?

Rubella is spread by direct contact with droplets produced by coughing or sneezing. The virus can be most easily spread beginning a week before the rash appears, until a week after the rash appears.

## Treatment

There is no specific treatment for Rubella. People with rubella should get plenty of rest and stay hydrated by drinking fluids. A non-aspirin product (acetaminophen, ibuprofen) can be used to reduce fever and discomfort.

## Prevention

The Rubella vaccine (contained in the MMR vaccine) is the most effective way to prevent rubella.

- Children should get 2 doses of MMR vaccine. The first dose at 12-15 months of age The second dose at 4-6 years of age
- Due to the severe consequences of rubella infection during pregnancy, it is very important for women of childbearing age to know if they are protected against rubella.
- A lab test can be done if a woman is unsure about having had rubella disease or the vaccine.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org/Home>

or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
Ingham County Health Department 5303 S. Cedar St. Lansing, MI 48911

Updated: May 2016