



Rubella and pregnancy

What you need to know



What is Rubella (German measles)?

Rubella is a contagious disease caused by a virus.

How is it spread?

Rubella is spread by close contact with an infected person, through coughing and sneezing. It is most contagious when the person has a rash, but it can spread up to 7 days before the rash appears.

How serious is rubella?

Rubella causes a rash, fever and swollen glands. It is usually a mild illness in children. Some people who get rubella do not have any symptoms but can still spread the disease.

If a woman gets rubella in early pregnancy:

- it may cause miscarriage or stillbirth.
- 9 out of 10 babies will have major birth defects such as deafness, blindness, brain damage or heart disease. This is known as congenital rubella syndrome (CRS).
- If you are more than 4 months pregnant it is unlikely that rubella will affect your baby.

How can congenital rubella syndrome be prevented?

Vaccination is the only way to prevent congenital rubella syndrome. Rubella vaccine is only available as a combined MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella) vaccine. MMR vaccine can be given at any age.

I am planning a pregnancy what should I do?

You should check your immunisation records to see if you have ever received a dose of rubella or MMR vaccine.

If you have evidence you have had at least one dose of these vaccines, then this is taken as evidence of protection.

If you have not received a dose of a rubella containing vaccine or are not sure, then you should ask your GP to test your immunity to rubella.

What should I do if I have not received a rubella containing vaccine or my test for rubella is negative?

You should get a dose of MMR vaccine before you become pregnant. You should avoid pregnancy for one month after vaccination.

Can I have the MMR vaccine in pregnancy?

It is not recommended that you have the MMR vaccine during pregnancy.

What if someone I know has a rash?

Women who are not immune to rubella should try to avoid close contact with anyone with a rash during pregnancy.

If you have been in contact with someone with a rash or develop a rash yourself you should seek advice from your doctor or midwife as soon as possible.

I have just had a baby and my rubella test was negative, what should I do?

You should check your immunisation records to see if you have ever received a dose of rubella or MMR vaccine.

If you have evidence you have had at least one dose of these vaccines, then this is taken as evidence of protection.

If you have not received a dose of a rubella containing vaccine or are not sure, then you need one dose of the MMR vaccine. Two doses are required for protection against measles and mumps.

What can I expect after the vaccination?

After getting the MMR vaccine, your arm may be sore, swollen or red around the area where the injection was given. Very rarely, you may develop joint swelling, joint pain, or swollen glands 2-3 weeks after vaccination. This is not contagious.

Are there any precautions to take after vaccination?


Yes you should avoid pregnancy for one month after vaccination because MMR vaccine is made from weakened live viruses.

Are there people who should not get the MMR vaccine?

There are very few people who should not get the MMR vaccine.

You should not get MMR vaccine if you:

- are pregnant.
- had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous MMR vaccine or any part of this vaccine for example neomycin or gelatine.
- have a disease or are on treatment that affects your immune system.
- had a recent blood transfusion.



You should delay getting the vaccine if you are:

- ill with a fever higher than 38°C.

If you have any concerns, talk to your GP or nurse in the maternity hospital.

For further information see **www.immunisation.ie**.