



The National Maternity Hospital



RUBELLA AND PREGNANCY

INFORMATION LEAFLET

WHAT IS RUBELLA?

Rubella (German Measles) is a contagious disease caused by a virus. It can cause infection in children and adults and congenital rubella infection (passes from mum to baby in the womb).

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Rubella is spread by close contact with an infected person through coughing or sneezing. The incubation period is typically 14 days (range 12-23). It is most contagious when the person has a rash, but it can spread up to 7 days before the rash appears.

SYMPTOMS OF RUBELLA

Rubella causes mild flu like symptoms such as an itchy rash, fever, swollen glands, runny nose, sore throat and/or conjunctivitis. Sometimes adults get painful joints. Swollen glands precede the rash and may last several weeks. The rash lasts 3 days, starting on the face, progressing from the head to the feet. Some people who get rubella do not have any symptoms but can still spread the disease.



RUBELLA IN PREGNANCY

If a woman gets rubella in early pregnancy:

- It may cause miscarriage, stillbirth or premature delivery.
- 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). It can also cause bone and neurological abnormalities.
- If you are more than 4 months pregnant it is unlikely that rubella will affect your baby.

Apart from pregnancy related complications, complications are rare and more likely to occur in adults.



HOW CAN CONGENITAL RUBELLA SYNDROME BE PREVENTED?

Vaccination is the only way to prevent Congenital Rubella Syndrome.

The rubella vaccine is only available as a combined MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella) vaccine.

MMR vaccination forms part of the childhood vaccination schedule in Ireland.

It can be given though at any age. Two doses of the MMR vaccine are required to give the best protection.

MMR vaccine is a live vaccine and is not recommended during pregnancy. If needed, you should receive the MMR vaccination before getting pregnant.

The NMH routinely screen all pregnant women for rubella immunity at the booking visit. If you are rubella non-immune, the MMR vaccine can be given after you have had your baby.

It is safe to receive it while you are breastfeeding.

Women who are rubella non-immune should try to avoid close contact with anyone with a rash during pregnancy.

The HSE launched an MMR catch up vaccination programme in 2023 due to the increase in measles cases. There are very few people who should not get the MMR vaccine.

You should not get the MMR vaccine if you:

- Are pregnant (as discussed above)
- Had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous MMR vaccine.
- Have a disease or are on treatment that affects your immune system.
- Had a recent blood transfusion.
- Are ill and have a fever above 38°C.

Research has shown there is no link between the MMR vaccine and autism.

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 the MMR vaccination. This is not contagious.

You should avoid pregnancy for one month after receiving the MMR vaccine.



WHEN TO CONTACT GP OR THE NMH:

If you are in contact with someone who has a rash or you develop a rash, please contact your GP or NMH Outpatients Department or Emergency Department as soon as possible

CONTACT



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