

Rubella

What is rubella?

Rubella also known as German measles is a disease caused by the rubella virus.

Rubella is usually a mild illness but can be very serious for pregnant women and their unborn babies. If a pregnant woman is infected with rubella she may have a miscarriage or stillbirth, or her baby may be born with severe abnormalities, including deafness, eye problems, heart defects, liver, spleen and brain damage. This is called Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS) and occurs in about 9 out of 10 babies born to women who have rubella infection in the first 3 months of pregnancy. CRS is rare because so many women are immune to rubella infection due to routine immunization. Cases still occur in Canada, however, in babies born to women who immigrate to Canada as rubella immunization is not routine in many parts of the world.

What are the symptoms of rubella?

Symptoms may include a rash, fever, joint aches, headache, discomfort, runny nose and irritated eyes. The lymph nodes located behind the ears and at the back of the neck may swell and feel painful.

The rash, which may be itchy, begins first on the face and then moves downwards from the head to the feet, and lasts about 3 days. About half of all rubella infections show no symptoms of a rash.

Symptoms can appear 14 to 21 days after a person is infected with the rubella virus. In most cases, symptoms appear 14 to 17 days after exposure to the virus.

How is rubella spread?

Rubella is spread by contact with saliva or mucus from the mouth, nose or throat of an infected person. When an infected person coughs or sneezes, the virus spreads through droplets in the air. You can become infected when you breathe in these droplets or touch objects contaminated with the virus

When is a person infectious?

A person with rubella can spread the virus to others from 7 days before to 7 days or more after the rash first appears. Infants with congenital rubella may shed virus and therefore remain infectious for months after birth.

How do I know if I am immune?

An employee is considered immune if he/she has:

- Documented evidence of vaccination with 1 dose of rubella-containing vaccine after their 1st birthday
- Rubella IgG levels >10mIU/mL

History of disease is not accepted as immunity.

If the employee has not provided Workplace Health with the above information, he/she will be considered non-immune.

When is an employee exposed?

A non-immune employee is considered exposed if they did not use personal protective measures **and** had direct and droplet contact of the oral or nasal mucous membranes with respiratory secretions from an infected individual during the infectious period **or** direct and indirect contact of the oral or nasal mucous membranes with urine from an infant with congenital rubella syndrome.

What happens if an employee is exposed?

If an employee is exposed to and is immune to rubella, they do not need to alter any activities and can continue to work.

If you have been exposed:

1. have your blood draw for STAT for rubella IgG testing
2. receive a dose of MMR (except if contraindicated) if exposure did not result in infection in order to provide protection in the event of future exposures. Live virus vaccine given after exposure does not prevent illness
3. receive rubella immune globulin within 48 hours of exposure, in order to attempt to modify or suppress symptoms, even though immune globulin is not fully effective in preventing infection, including congenital infection
4. remain off work between day 7 (post first exposure) and day 21 (post last exposure) inclusive until testing results are in
 - If you have protective levels of IgG, you may return to work
 - If you have no protection, you must remain off until day 21 post last exposure
 - If you develop rubella, you must remain off until 7 days after the rash onset

Non-immune, exposed employees who are pregnant or immunocompromised will be referred to their physician for clinical management.

What happens if an employee has rubella?

Possibly infected employees must stay away from work and see their doctor as soon as possible for confirmation of the disease and treatment. Contact your physician beforehand so they can take precautions for your arrival.

Confirmed infected employees must stay away from work until 7 days after rash onset.

Manager/Supervisor Responsibilities:

Suspected Outbreak or staff exposure from patient: consult with Infection Control. Infection Control will confirm diagnosis, notify and collaborate with the Workplace Health Call Centre Occupational Health Nurse (WHCC OHN). No additional action required until confirmation of disease.

Confirmed Outbreak/Staff exposure: Infection Control will inform the WHCC OHN of the confirmed disease exposure. The WHCC OHN will contact the manager and send out an exposure notification memo to the manager. Please advise all staff members that meet the exposure criteria to contact the WHCC OHN at 1-866-922-9464.

Advise infected employees to contact the WHCC OHN.

Employee Responsibilities:

Infected or exposed employee: please contact the WHCC OHN at 1-866-922-9464 and review the information above.

Additional Information/References:

- HealthLinkBC File: [Rubella](#). May 2012. Retrieved on May 15, 2013.
- Canada Communicable Disease Report. [Prevention & Control of Occupational Infections in Health Care](#). March 2002. Retrieved on May 15, 2013