

Where **kids** come first

# Rubella: Screening before pregnancy



L'Hôpital de Montréal pour enfants  
The Montreal Children's Hospital

Centre universitaire de santé McGill  
McGill University Health Centre

Ten percent of all women in the reproductive age group lack antibodies to protect against the rubella infection. According to the team from the Obstetrics and Gynecology Division of the Royal Victoria Hospital of the McGill University Health Centre, rubella is a mild and harmless illness in healthy people, but it can have devastating effects on the developing fetus if contracted by a susceptible, pregnant woman.

## ERADICATING RUBELLA

The government of Quebec, in its *Policy on Health and Well-Being (1992)*, targeted the elimination of rubella by the year 2002. In Quebec, 22,000 cases of rubella were recorded in 1956. Since the introduction of the vaccination, the number of cases has been drastically reduced to 119 cases in 1990 and 48 in 1995. There were 85 cases of Congenital Rubella Syndrome from 1965 to 1980 throughout the province. There were 26 reported cases between 1981 and 1994; two of which were in 1993.



## Symptoms

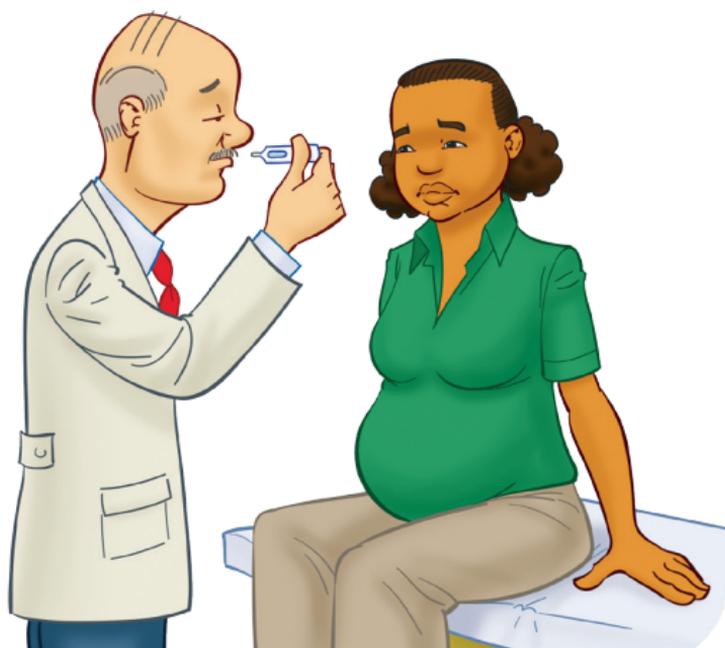
Rubella, also known as German measles, is a viral infection. Airborne droplets, direct contact, or articles contaminated with secretion transmit the rubella virus from person to person. After an incubation period of 14 to 21 days, rubella in the adult causes a low-grade fever, headache, malaise, loss of appetite, irritated eyes (conjunctivitis), cough, and sore throat. After a few days, these symptoms get better and a rash appears on the face, which later disappears from the face and spreads to the torso and extremities. The rash is non-specific and resembles many viral rashes; it may last about 3 days. Joint pain may appear after the rash fades. It is important to know that many people who contract rubella don't know they have the disease, as the usual symptoms may be quite mild and resemble a cold or flu.

# What every woman should know

## **Vaccination is recommended for all women of reproductive age**

Pregnancy should be delayed for three months after vaccination. All pregnant women are screened by a routine blood test early in pregnancy. Those who lack protective antibodies must be vaccinated as soon as possible after the birth of the baby in order to protect any future children.

Pregnant women should avoid contact with children who have a fever or a new rash.



**All pregnant women who experience a fever accompanied by a rash should consult their healthcare provider.**

# Congenital Rubella Syndrome

The risk of giving birth to an infant with Congenital Rubella Syndrome is estimated to be 50 percent when maternal rubella infection occurs in the first month of pregnancy, 25 percent when it occurs in the second month, and 10 percent when it occurs in the third month, decreasing to less than 1 percent throughout the rest of the pregnancy. There is no specific treatment for the infant once congenital infection has occurred.

Babies with Congenital Rubella Syndrome are often deaf, have heart problems and have a low birth weight. In severe cases, the child may be mentally handicapped.

**To obtain more information concerning rubella screening and vaccination, contact your healthcare professional.**



This information was prepared by the Pediatric Consultation Centre (PCC) of The Montreal Children's Hospital

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