



# Prevention of rubella

Information for women  
planning a pregnancy  
or after giving birth



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

## **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).

## **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?**

If you are planning a pregnancy you should ask your GP to test your immunity to rubella. If the test shows you have no immunity you should get MMR vaccine before you become pregnant. You should avoid pregnancy for one month after vaccination because MMR vaccine is made from weakened live viruses.

## **I have just had a baby what should I do?**

During pregnancy your immunity to rubella is routinely checked. If you have no immunity you should get MMR vaccine after giving birth. The MMR vaccine is safe to give while you are breastfeeding.

## **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. 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](http://www.immunisation.ie)**