

Information for women who are not protected against rubella (German measles)

This leaflet is for women who have had an antenatal screening test and have been told they are not protected against rubella (also known as German measles).

The leaflet explains the result and gives information about:

- rubella infection during pregnancy; and
- the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (MMR) that you will be offered at the end of your pregnancy.

We do not recommend having a vaccination against rubella while you are pregnant.

What is rubella?

Rubella is a disease caused by a virus. In children it is usually mild and may not even be noticed. It causes a short-lived rash, swollen glands and a sore throat. Rubella is very serious for unborn babies. If a pregnant woman catches rubella in the first three months of her pregnancy, the virus can affect the baby in 9 out of 10 pregnancies. Rubella can seriously damage the baby's sight, hearing, heart and brain.

How is rubella spread?

Rubella is about as infectious as flu and is spread in the same way as measles and mumps, through coughs and sneezes. In some cases, pregnant women catch rubella from their own, or their friends', children.

If your blood test showed that you are not protected against rubella, this could be because:

- you have never had rubella (also known as German measles);
- you did not have a full course of rubella vaccinations (or an MMR vaccination) as a child; or
- you had the vaccination but your body did not make antibodies to protect you from rubella. This happens in up to 5% of women (1 in 20) after having one dose of the vaccine.

What if I am not protected against rubella and I am already pregnant?

We do not recommend having a vaccination against rubella while you are pregnant. Your midwife or doctor will offer you two MMR vaccinations – the first vaccination should be after the end of the pregnancy and the second vaccination should be four weeks later.

How will not being protected against rubella affect my pregnancy?

You could catch rubella if you come into contact with a person who has the virus. If you catch rubella when you are in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, it can cause serious damage to the baby's brain, heart, eyes and hearing.

What should I do now?

- Try to avoid physical contact with people who have a rash or an unknown illness.
- If you think you have come into contact with someone who has signs of rubella, such as a rash, tell your midwife or doctor.

- If you get a rash during your pregnancy, contact your midwife or doctor. They may advise you to have blood tests to find out if the rash is because of a rubella infection. If you are more than 20 weeks pregnant when you get rubella, it is very unlikely that your baby will be affected.
- If you get rubella and you are less than 20 weeks pregnant, you will be offered an appointment with your hospital doctor (the obstetrician) to discuss the risks to your baby. After this discussion, you can decide to continue with or end your pregnancy.

What happens after the end of my pregnancy?

Your midwife or doctor should offer or arrange for you to have the first MMR vaccination (by injection) while you are still in hospital. Ask the staff for the MMR vaccination if it is not offered to you. You should arrange to have the second vaccination at your GP (general practitioner) surgery four weeks after the first vaccination. After having these vaccinations, most women are protected for future pregnancies.

If you have had a blood transfusion in the three months before the delivery or after the delivery, your GP may do a blood test to check that the vaccinations have worked. You should avoid getting pregnant for one month after having the second MMR vaccination.

If you are pregnant at the time of your vaccination you should talk to your doctor or midwife about this. Studies of several hundred women who continued their pregnancies after vaccination have showed that none of the babies suffered damage from the vaccination.

It is safe to breastfeed your baby after having MMR vaccinations.

Where can I get more information?

You can get more information from:

- the hospital midwife who specialises in antenatal screening or the hospital doctor (the obstetrician);
- the NHS Direct 24-hour helpline – 0845 46 47;
- the NHS website – www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk;
- the Public Health Wales website – www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/43510; and
- NHS Choices – www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx



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www.antenatalscreening.org

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