



Central Michigan District Health Department  
*“Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities”*

For more information, call your local CMDHD branch office:

Arenac (989) 846-6541/Clare (989) 539-6731/Gladwin (989) 426-9431/  
Isabella (989) 773-5921/Osceola (231) 832-5532/Roscommon (989) 366-9166

[www.cmdhd.org](http://www.cmdhd.org)

## Rubella

### What is Rubella?

About 50,000 American children die before birth or were born with defects because their mothers contracted rubella while pregnant during the 1964-65 epidemic. The vaccine, which was licensed in 1969, ultimately can eliminate rubella.

Primary targets for vaccination are children aged one to 12. They are main sources of rubella infection. If enough children are vaccinated, the rubella virus may be wiped out.

The mere existence of a vaccine is not enough to stamp out a disease, however. The real danger of rubella is that too many people do not take it seriously enough. Many people know it only as three-day measles – an innocent-sounding alias. Almost everyone thinks of it as a harmless, childhood disease. But this is not only a disease of childhood, and therein lies its danger.

Fourteen percent of the women of childbearing age in this country are still susceptible to rubella. This is one woman in seven. Rubella is dangerous to the fetus if a woman catches it while she's pregnant because the placenta offers no barrier against the virus. The first three months of pregnancy are the time this disease poses the greatest threat to the growing embryo. It can cause a miscarriage, a stillbirth, or a birth defect.

Because the virus in the vaccine may damage the unborn, doctors warn against inoculating women of childbearing years, unless it is certain they are not pregnant or will not become pregnant within three months of inoculation.

A doctor can tell from blood tests taken before and at intervals during pregnancy whether a woman is susceptible to rubella, and if she is, whether she remains uninfected. If so, the doctor probably will recommend vaccination right after delivery to protect any future babies she may have. If there are older children in the family, they should all be vaccinated.

### What are the signs and symptoms of Rubella?

Rubella symptoms, ironically enough, are quite mild:

- Low-grade fever
- A rash starting on the face and spreading down the body
- Swelling of the lymph glands in the neck

These signs may be so slight that a pregnant woman doesn't even know she's had the disease-until her child is born with defects.

Rubella is usually over in one to three days with no lasting effect, unless the victim happens to be an unborn child. Then the effects are lasting indeed. Loss of hearing, impaired vision, congenitally damaged heart, and mental retardation are common among German measles babies. Many do not survive.

Clubs and organizations in many areas participate with public health officials and medical authorities in encouraging large-scale rubella inoculation programs for children through public health education and community services.

### **How can Rubella be prevented?**

Keeping the public aware of the continuing need to vaccinate each new generation of children is extremely important. Otherwise, the effectiveness of widespread immunization can disappear within a few years, and again pose danger of infection to pregnant women.

Many people think rubella is the same as “regular” measles. They’re wrong. They are two different things. The fact that a “regular” measles vaccination campaign has been conducted over the last 10 years has given many people the false impression that their children have already been inoculated against all types of measles. *Vaccination against “regular” measles is not protection at all against rubella.*

Many of the children born with birth defects caused by rubella have not just one, but two or more afflictions. Often handicapped by loss of hearing, impairment of vision, and perhaps a defective heart, they also require early, intensive training if they are to realize their full potential.

Unfortunately, few schools exist for multi-handicapped children. The thousands of children born with defects after the 1964-65 epidemic and now in school threaten to swamp even the schools for the singly handicapped. Society must face this problem squarely. We must see to it that these children, blind or deaf or brain-damaged already, are not hurt further by our neglect.