

Rubella

(German Measles)



Causative agent

It is also known as "German Measles" and is caused by rubella virus.

Clinical features

People usually present with a diffuse rash, fever, headache, malaise, enlargement of lymph nodes, upper respiratory symptoms and conjunctivitis.



The rash usually lasts for about 3 days, but some patients may not have rash at all. Arthralgia or arthritis occurs more commonly in adult women with rubella. Rubella infection can also cause anomalies in the developing foetus. Congenital rubella syndrome, characterised by deafness, cataract, heart malformations, mental retardation etc., is likely to occur in infants born to women who got infected during the first 3 months of pregnancy.

Mode of transmission

It can be transmitted by contact with secretions from nose and throat of infected persons through droplet spread or direct contact with patients. This is a highly infectious disease and the patient can pass the disease to other persons from 1 week before to 1 week after onset of rash.

Incubation period

It ranges from 12 – 23 days, usually 14 days.

Management

There is no specific treatment but drugs may be prescribed to reduce discomfort.

Prevention

Maintain good personal hygiene

- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or door knobs or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretion after coughing or sneezing. Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel or hand dryer. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, hand hygiene with 70 to 80% alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative.



- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly.



- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.

- Affected persons should be advised to stay at home for 7 days from the appearance of rash and avoid contact with any susceptible persons, particularly pregnant women and women preparing for pregnancy. This is because pregnant women who do not have the immunity to rubella would contract the disease and their foetus could also be affected as well. Therefore, close pregnant contacts should be traced and their immune status should be checked.



Maintain good environmental hygiene

- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as furniture, toys and commonly shared items with 1:99 diluted household bleach (mixing 1 part of 5.25% bleach with 99 parts of water), leave for 15 – 30 minutes, and then rinse with water and keep dry. For metallic surface, disinfect with 70% alcohol.
- Use absorbent disposable towels to wipe away obvious contaminants such as respiratory secretions, and then disinfect the surface and neighbouring areas with 1:49 diluted household bleach (mixing 1 part of 5.25% bleach with 49 parts of water), leave for 15 – 30 minutes and then rinse with water and keep dry. For metallic surface, disinfect with 70% alcohol.
- Maintain good indoor ventilation.

Immunisation

- Immunisation with rubella-containing vaccine is effective in preventing the disease. Under the Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme, children receive a two-dose course of rubella vaccination.
- Women of childbearing age who are not immunised should check their immune status before planning for pregnancy and receive rubella-containing vaccine if necessary.

