

### **What is rubella?**

Rubella, or German measles, is a viral infection which spreads easily from one person to another. It is normally a mild illness. Someone with rubella usually has a rash and feels unwell for about a week. Due to the success of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination, rubella is now rare in the UK.

However, if you catch rubella in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, it can cause serious damage to your baby's brain, heart, eyes and hearing. This is called congenital rubella syndrome.

### **How can I stop myself getting rubella?**

The safe and effective MMR vaccine will protect you against rubella. It is free and you can be vaccinated at your GP surgery. You will be protected from rubella if you have ever had two doses of a vaccine containing rubella. You will need two doses of the vaccine if you haven't had (or cannot remember having) the vaccines.

You cannot have the vaccine while you are pregnant, so if you are thinking of having a baby it is a good idea to check that you have had your MMR vaccines.

### **Why has rubella screening in pregnancy stopped?**

The World Health Organization has stated that congenital rubella syndrome has been almost wiped out in the UK. There have been no cases in Wales in the last decade and only 12 cases in England, none of which would have been prevented by the screening programme.

Rubella screening does not give any protection during pregnancy as, if you were found to be susceptible (likely to get rubella), you could not be given the MMR vaccine until after your baby was born.

### **What if rubella comes back?**

Rubella infections are rare in the UK and rates of infection are not expected to rise, but levels of infection will continue to be monitored. The evidence suggests that stopping antenatal screening for rubella is very unlikely to result in increased rates of congenital rubella syndrome.

### **Why is having the MMR vaccine before I get pregnant so important?**

The MMR vaccine has been shown to be both safe and effective. Two doses of the MMR vaccine protect you from rubella, mumps and measles.

This vaccine cannot be given in pregnancy. If you are thinking of becoming pregnant it is important to check that you have had two doses of the MMR vaccine in the past. If you haven't had two doses in the past you should get the vaccinations before you get pregnant. **You need to avoid becoming pregnant for at least a month after the second dose.**

### **How can I find out what vaccinations I have had?**

If you are not sure what vaccinations you have had, you should ask your GP surgery to check your immunisation history, which may be recorded in your GP records.

### **I am not sure if I have had two doses of the MMR vaccine. What do I do?**

Check with your GP surgery – if there is no record of you having two doses it is recommended that you have another two doses. But it's important to remember that these vaccines cannot be given in pregnancy.

### **I have had two doses of MMR – what else do I need to do?**

If you have had two doses of MMR you do not need to have any more.

### **Can I have the rubella screening test when I am pregnant?**

No, the screening programme stopped on 3 October 2016. If you book for antenatal care after that date you will not be able to have screening for rubella during pregnancy. If you are already pregnant you can be immunised after your baby is born. The first vaccination should be in the first few weeks after the baby is born, followed by a second dose a month later.

### **I have recently moved to the UK and can't access my vaccination history**

When you register with a GP, you and all of your family should be assessed and offered MMR immunisation and other vaccines if necessary.

### **What vaccinations should I have before pregnancy?**

You should make sure that you have two doses of MMR before becoming pregnant.

### **What vaccinations should I have during pregnancy?**

During pregnancy you should receive whooping cough (pertussis) and flu (influenza) vaccines to protect you and your baby from these serious illnesses.

## **What do I need to do if I'm pregnant and have been in contact with a person with a rash, or I have a rash while pregnant?**

You should ring your midwife or GP for advice as soon as possible. They will need to ask you questions about the rash, to assess whether you need any follow-up.

You can also get advice and guidance from the [Antenatal Screening Wales 'infections and pregnancy- protecting your baby' booklet](#) and the 'Pregnancy – how to help protect you and your baby' leaflet, which are currently being developed and will be available to download from [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/doityourself/vaccinations/Leaflets/](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/doityourself/vaccinations/Leaflets/)

