

Patient information factsheet

Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine

Measles, mumps and rubella are highly infectious viral diseases which can cause serious illness and complications. Rubella, in particular, can be serious for pregnant women due to the risks to their unborn baby.

For this reason all pregnant women are offered a blood test to check whether they are immune to rubella at their 'booking appointment'. This does not identify infection in your current pregnancy, but it does determine whether or not you are protected against rubella for any future pregnancies.

Pregnant women who are not protected against rubella are referred to as 'rubella susceptible', and are offered vaccination to protect future pregnancies after the birth of their baby (during the postnatal period).

This factsheet will be appropriate for you if your antenatal blood tests have shown you have low or uncertain levels of immunity against rubella. It will also be useful if you are considering becoming pregnant as your GP can check your rubella immunity with a simple blood test.

Understanding measles, mumps and rubella

Measles: this can cause serious illness particularly in young infants and older adults. Measles can affect people of all ages and it is not possible to tell who will become seriously ill. Symptoms include a high fever and rash. Complications include chest infections, fits and encephalitis (swelling of the brain). It can also cause miscarriage and serious illness in pregnancy. In very serious cases, measles can cause death.

Mumps: this can cause fever, headaches and painful swollen glands in the face, neck and jaw. Serious complications include deafness, viral meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain) and encephalitis (swelling of the brain). It can also cause painful swelling of the testicles in males and the ovaries in females.

Rubella (German measles): this is usually a mild illness and many people have no symptoms. In others it causes a short-lived rash, swollen glands and a sore throat. However, rubella infection can be very serious in pregnancy, particularly in the first 12 weeks, because the unborn baby can become infected. The risk of serious damage to the baby's sight, hearing, heart or brain is high. This condition is called congenital rubella syndrome.

Rubella is spread very easily from person to person as the virus is carried in the air and it is not always possible to tell if someone has it. In up to nine out of ten cases, pregnant women catch rubella from children. This is why all children are offered the MMR vaccination at one year of age and just before starting school.

Understanding your level of rubella susceptibility

You may be considered 'rubella susceptible' if you have not had rubella in the past or do not have immunity from a previous vaccination. The vaccine is very effective in protecting against rubella; however, roughly one in 20 people who have had the vaccine will not be fully protected. It is

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important to discuss your blood test results with your GP, as this will enable you to discuss any previous vaccinations you have received. If you have had two previous doses of MMR, immunity to rubella may be assumed and further doses are not required. Having a third vaccine, however, would not cause you any harm.

If your blood test shows that you are not immune, you may be at risk of catching rubella. It is important that you avoid anyone with the rubella virus. If you are in contact with anyone who has a rash or in whom rubella is suspected (this includes any face-to-face contact or being in the same room for more than 15 minutes), please inform your GP or midwife immediately.

You should contact your GP or midwife by phone and arrange an appointment. **Do not visit your GP surgery without calling them first.** If you do, you will put any pregnant women who may be there at risk of catching the rubella infection. Your GP should be able to arrange a time for you to visit that won't put other people at risk.

Protecting yourself and future pregnancies from rubella

The MMR vaccine is a combined vaccine that offers you protection against measles, mumps and rubella. The vaccine is very safe and an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence concludes that there is no link between MMR and autism. It is a 'live vaccine', however, which means it contains weakened strains of the viruses and may cause mild symptoms of the diseases it protects against. The MMR vaccine will therefore be offered to you after your baby is born as giving 'live vaccines' in pregnancy is not recommended.

It is important you receive **TWO** doses of the MMR vaccine:

- Have the first dose soon after your baby is born.
- Have the second dose at least four weeks later. You will need to arrange this with your GP, so why not make this appointment when you arrange your six-week postnatal appointment!. If you are breastfeeding, receiving the MMR vaccine will not cause harm to you or your baby.

It is important that you receive TWO doses of MMR before you become pregnant again. This will protect you against rubella in your future pregnancies, as well as measles and mumps. If you are protected against these infections then you cannot pass them onto your unborn child or other family and friends in the future.

You are advised to take precautions to prevent yourself becoming pregnant for four weeks following the second dose of the vaccine. Should you become pregnant during this time, please tell your doctor or midwife immediately.

Even if you are not planning to have any more babies it is important to make sure everyone is fully protected. Measles and mumps can be serious illnesses outside of pregnancy. Being protected against rubella will also stop you from spreading rubella to other pregnant women, for whom the infection could be very serious.

For further information

If you have any further questions or concerns please discuss them with your GP or your midwife at your next antenatal appointment. You may also find the following website provides you with useful information: www.infectiousdiseases.screening.nhs.uk

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, braille or audio, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.