Rubella and pregnancy

This leaflet gives information about rubella (German Measles) and how to reduce the chances of you or your baby being affected by rubella.

Results from your recent blood test found that you are not protected against rubella. This could be because:

- You have never had rubella
- You did not receive a full course of rubella vaccination (or MMR) as a child
- You had the vaccination but your body did not make enough antibodies to protect you from rubella. This happens in up to 1 in 20 women having one dose of the vaccine.

What is rubella and how it is spread

Rubella is an illness caused by a virus. It is usually mild, causing a short-lived rash, sore throat and swollen glands. Like many viruses, it is spread through coughs and sneezes.

Rubella in pregnancy

If a woman catches rubella after 20 weeks of pregnancy it is unlikely that her baby will be affected.

However, it can be very serious for the unborn child if a woman catches rubella before 12 weeks of pregnancy. Rubella can cause damage to the baby’s sight, hearing, brain and heart. This is called congenital rubella syndrome (CRS).

It is very important to recognise the signs of rubella as early as possible. You should seek advice from your doctor or midwife if you have been in contact with someone who has a rash or if you think you may have symptoms.
After your baby is born

In order to protect you from rubella, you will need to have the MMR vaccine, which is given in 2 injections a month apart. As this vaccine is not suitable for use in pregnancy you should be offered the first vaccination after your baby is born and before you are discharged from our care. The second vaccination will be given at your GP surgery.

Why will I be offered MMR and not a single rubella vaccine?

Single rubella vaccine is no longer manufactured. Rubella vaccine is now offered as part of the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine. This is the internationally recognised vaccine of choice and is in line with the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations.

What if I have already had measles and mumps?

This is not a problem; the vaccine will just boost your immunity to these infections.

The MMR vaccine

After having the MMR vaccination most women will be protected against rubella.

You should avoid becoming pregnant for one month after the vaccinations, so you need to have a reliable method of contraception. However, reports from the USA, UK and Germany have not found any cases of congenital rubella syndrome in babies born to women who were vaccinated before they knew they were pregnant.
Are there any side effects of the immunisation?
You may experience a high temperature or a rash; both should be short-lived. Paracetamol may be taken to reduce your temperature – check instructions on the packet for the correct dose. Tenderness at the injection site is likely but if this is bigger than a 10p coin and spreading over your arm, you should seek medical advice.

Can MMR affect my baby if I wish to breast-feed?
Many doses of MMR vaccine have been given to breastfeeding women with no reports of harm.

Where can I learn more?
NHS direct 24 hour helpline 0845 46 47
NHS website www.nhs.uk
MMR website www.mmrthefacts.nhs.uk
Health Protection Agency www.hpa.org.uk

References:
DOH PL/CMO/2003/7 Protecting women against Rubella
National Screening Committee Standards Aug 2003 and Antenatal Screening Subgroup July 2002
Health Protection Agency
If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221473 or email PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk

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