

Congenital Rubella Syndrome

What is congenital rubella syndrome (CRS)?

Congenital rubella syndrome describes a condition in infants born to women who were infected with the rubella virus during their pregnancy. The syndrome is more likely to occur in infants whose mothers were infected early in the pregnancy. Up to 90 percent of infants born to women infected with rubella during the first 10 weeks of their pregnancy may have abnormalities, usually in their major organs. Miscarriages and stillbirths may occur if the mother is infected very early in pregnancy, even when the mother does not show signs of rubella infection. Deformities are rare if infection occurred after 20 weeks in the pregnancy.

What are the symptoms of congenital rubella syndrome (CRS)?

In children with mild disease, congenital rubella may cause slight hearing impairment or mild cardiac disease. The symptoms may go unnoticed until months or years after birth.

However, more serious CRS may result in single or multiple problems, such as:

- Hearing loss
- Cataracts
- Abnormally small eyes
- Congenital glaucoma
- An abnormally small head
- Inflammation of the brain and its lining
- Developmental delays/growth retardation
- Jaundice
- Enlargement of the liver and spleen
- Heart defects
- Red or purple discolorations under the skin that do not disappear when applying pressure and releasing

Diagnosis of rubella must be made by laboratory confirmation; however, moderate to severe CRS is usually recognizable at birth.

How does rubella spread?

The rubella virus spreads in the respiratory droplets from an infected person's mouth, nose and throat. If a pregnant woman becomes infected with rubella and her child is born with CRS, it is possible for the baby to infect others after it is born. Infants with congenital rubella syndrome pass the virus in their urine and their respiratory secretions, possibly for months after birth.

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca



How can congenital rubella be prevented?

Congenital Rubella Syndrome can only be prevented by preventing rubella infection in pregnant women. Rubella can be prevented through immunization. One dose of vaccine provides significant and long-lasting protection. Most people born since 1991 have received two doses of the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine.

Adolescent girls and women of childbearing age who are planning to get pregnant should speak with a doctor about protection from rubella. A blood test is available to determine if they are protected. Rubella vaccine should be avoided during pregnancy. Women who are pregnant and have not had a blood test to determine their immunity to rubella should consult their physician if they are exposed to rubella.

What is the treatment for rubella?

There is no specific treatment for rubella. Infants born with CRS may or may not require follow-up and specialized care, depending on the severity of the impairments.

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