

# Rubella and pregnancy

## What you need to know

### How will I get the MMR vaccine?

After the birth of your baby, you will usually be offered the first dose of MMR vaccine before you leave hospital (unless you can produce documented evidence of having had 2 doses of the MMR vaccine previously). The second dose can be arranged by your GP at your post-natal check.

The vaccine is given into the upper arm. It is important to have the two doses to be properly protected.

**It is advised that you should not become pregnant for at least four weeks after having the MMR vaccine. If you do become pregnant within this time, speak to your doctor or midwife.**

### Do I need the vaccine if I do not plan to have any more babies?

Having the vaccine will protect you from infection and prevent you from spreading the diseases to others, especially pregnant women, for whom these illnesses can be particularly serious.

### What side effects can I expect?

The vaccine may cause very mild symptoms of the diseases it protects against, but these cannot cause infection or be passed on to anyone.

### Isn't the MMR vaccine linked to autism?

No. An overwhelming amount of scientific evidence now shows there is **no link** between MMR and autism.

### Can I get the MMR vaccine while breastfeeding my baby?

Yes you can. Giving the MMR vaccine to breastfeeding mothers causes no harm to them or their babies.

### How can I find out more information?

You can discuss any issues and ask any questions you may have at your next appointment with your doctor or midwife.

You can also go to:

[www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)  
[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)



**Public Health Agency**, Ormeau Avenue Unit,  
18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast, BT2 8HS.  
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).  
[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)



### What is rubella?

Rubella is a disease caused by a virus and is commonly known as German measles. It causes a short-lived rash, swollen glands and sore throat. Most people, but not all, develop a rash. Some people may have no other symptoms and be unaware they are infectious. The disease can be passed on through coughing and sneezing.

### Why is rubella infection serious in pregnancy?

Rubella infection in the first three months of pregnancy can be very serious for the unborn baby. In 9 out of 10 cases, it can cause damage to the sight, hearing, heart and brain. This condition is called congenital rubella syndrome (CRS).

If you are more than four months pregnant, it is unlikely that rubella will affect your baby.

### How can infection be prevented?

Rubella immunity is achieved by two doses of Measles Mumps Rubella (MMR) vaccine at least four weeks apart. Whilst a documented history of receiving two doses of MMR is generally sufficient to confirm immunity, some pregnant women may still be found to be susceptible to rubella infection when tested antenatally.

In this instance, women are offered and administered MMR vaccine prior to discharge by maternity services. Whilst this means there may be some fully immunised women who receive



another dose of vaccine, there are no safety issues with receiving more than two doses of MMR.

If you are protected against these infections, it means you cannot pass them on to your unborn children, or to other pregnant women, in the future.

### I am already pregnant, what do I do?

Most adults in Northern Ireland will have developed immunity to rubella from having had the infection previously or having been vaccinated. Your antenatal rubella screening test will show if you are immune or not.

### What if I am not immune to rubella?

If you are not immune to rubella, you will be offered two doses of MMR vaccine, at least four weeks apart, after the birth of your baby (unless you can produce documented evidence of having had 2 doses of the MMR vaccine previously).

Vaccination with MMR is the best protection against rubella, as well as measles and mumps. The two doses of vaccine should give you protection in any future pregnancies.

### Can I have the vaccine during pregnancy?

It is not recommended that you have the vaccine during pregnancy. There is no evidence that the vaccine causes harm to unborn babies, but if you need the vaccine, you should have it after your baby is born.

### What if someone I know has a rash?

- Women who are not immune to rubella should try to avoid physical contact with people who have a rash or an unknown illness.
- If you are in contact with someone who has a rash, you should speak to your doctor or midwife as soon as possible.
- If you develop a rash, it is important you see your doctor or midwife as soon as possible.