

Rubella

Rubella is a viral infectious disease caused by the rubella virus. Congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) is a significant cause of foetal development disorders. If a woman becomes infected with the virus early in pregnancy (first ten weeks), there is a 90% chance that the virus will be transmitted to the foetus which can cause congenital rubella or even foetal death. The most common consequences of congenital rubella are deafness, eye damage, congenital heart disease and mental retardation.

The World Health Organization estimates that congenital rubella causes 700,000 deaths each year. Rubella vaccination was introduced in Slovenia in 1972, initially for women of childbearing age. In 1975, it became mandatory for all girls aged 12–14- in 1990, we introduced a combined vaccine against measles, mumps, and rubella for both sexes. Following the introduction of safe and effective vaccination, the incidence of rubella has decreased significantly, and no new cases of rubella have been reported since 2008.

Transmission

Rubella is transmitted through infectious droplets when coughing and sneezing, or through direct contact with droplets or saliva. Once the virus enters the body, it spreads throughout the body. The patient is contagious one week before and one week after the rash appears. During pregnancy, the rubella virus can be transmitted to the foetus. Children with congenital rubella can also shed the virus for up to one year.

Symptoms and signs of the disease

The rubella usually appears in a mild form with elevated body temperature, enlarged lymph nodes, and a rash on the face, neck, and body. The rash lasts for about three days. In babies born with congenital rubella, developmental defects may already be visible, or they may be born without any problems and these only become apparent by the age of 4.

Complications are more common in adults, namely pain and inflammation of the joints (especially in the fingers, wrists, and knees), and less commonly, blood clotting disorders and inflammation of the brain.

Complications of congenital rubella include hearing loss, cataracts, heart defects, and mental retardation.

Treatment

There is no specific treatment for rubella. Supportive treatment when symptoms appear includes lowering body temperature, relieving pain, and ensuring adequate fluid intake.

Prevention

Rubella is prevented by vaccination. Vaccination against rubella is included in the mandatory vaccination programme in Slovenia. The first dose is given to children between 12 and 18 months of age, and the second dose is given to children before they start school (between 5 and 6 years of age). The vaccine is a combination vaccine against measles, mumps and rubella.