Rubella (German Measles) and Pregnancy

Rubella is a viral infection that can be harmful to the pregnant woman and the baby. Most adults are immune to rubella because they had the disease as a child or they received the rubella vaccine. It has an effect on the fetus if it happens during the first trimester of pregnancy. The infection affects all stages of pregnancy. It has less effect as the pregnancy goes along. An infection in the first three months trimester increases the risk for losing the baby and birth defects.

You can catch rubella through spread by airborne droplets. The incubation period is 2 to 3 weeks following exposure. Once you have signs of illness, you are contagious from seven days before the start of rash to four days after the rash has developed.

EFFECTS ON THE UNBORN BABY:

Over 50% of infants born with rubella appear normal at birth. Many infants will later develop signs of infection. Common defects to the baby include:

- Congenital heart disease.
- Mental retardation.
- Deafness.
- Cataracts (eye problem).
- Miscarriage.
- Stillbirth.
- Premature delivery.
- Intrauterine growth retardation (small babies at term).

The risks increase if the infection occurs earlier in the pregnancy.

SYMPTOMS

- Fever.
- Rash that does not itch.
- Swollen lymph glands.
- Pain and swelling of joints.

DIAGNOSIS

- Blood tests are given to those who have been exposed or think they have rubella.
- Check ups during pregnancy for this infection are routine. It is best that this screening be done before all pregnancies.
- All planned pregnancies should be delayed at least one month following immunization if immunization is needed.
- After vaccination it is necessary to do blood screening again. There is a 5% failure rate of the vaccine.

TREATMENT

There is no effective treatment for a pregnant patient infected with rubella. It is necessary to avoid potential exposure.

If you are not immune to rubella, you should get the rubella vaccine before getting pregnant. You should not get the rubella vaccine while you are pregnant. If you are pregnant, you should get the rubella vaccine after you deliver the baby.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Get any and all needed vaccines before getting pregnant.
- Avoid contact with people who have or may have rubella.
- Avoid contact with other people if you think you have been exposed to someone with rubella.
- Call your caregiver if you have any questions or concerns regarding rubella.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C).
- You have been exposed to someone who has rubella.
- You develop a rash.
- You develop swollen lymph glands.
- You develop pain and swelling of your joints.

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