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Protecting Women Against Rubella: Switch From Rubella Vaccine To MMR

From October 2003, sero-negative women of child-bearing age and health care workers who need to be protected against rubella will be offered the combined measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine.

Rubella - Questions and Answers

Why am I being offered MMR and not single rubella vaccine?

We are unable to obtain any supplies of licensed single rubella vaccine, as manufacturers are concentrating their production on MMR vaccine. This is because MMR vaccine is recognised internationally as the vaccine of choice against measles, mumps and rubella diseases.

Is this a change in policy?

No - the policy remains that unprotected women of childbearing age need to be protected against rubella. What is changing is how that protection is given.

What is CRS?

CRS stands for Congenital Rubella Syndrome. This is the term used to describe the fetal damage and multiple defects, which are very common following maternal rubella infection in the first eight to ten weeks of pregnancy.

Will MMR affect my baby if I become pregnant?

You should avoid becoming pregnant for one month following MMR. Because of the known association between wild rubella virus and CRS, there were concerns that the attenuated (weakened) vaccine virus could carry the same risk. But surveillance in the USA, UK and Germany has found no case of CRS following inadvertent immunisation shortly before or during pregnancy. We try to avoid vaccinating pregnant women as a precaution, so if you are susceptible to rubella and pregnant, you will be offered vaccination after the baby is born.

But I have already had measles and mumps diseases so I don't need to be immunised against them.

Even if you have already had measles or mumps, you will not have a problem from being exposed to those viruses again. It's like any one of us who is immune meeting someone with the disease - the infection can't get established. If by chance you are not immune to measles or mumps, then you will benefit from MMR vaccination. Once immune to these diseases, you are no longer able to pass these infections to your baby - so your baby benefits after it has been born too.

Doesn't MMR vaccination cause autism?

There is no credible scientific evidence of a link between MMR and autism - and there is an ever-increasing body of research which shows no evidence of a link.

The World Health Organization describes MMR as a "highly effective vaccine which has an outstanding safety record".

Will MMR affect any future babies that I may have?

The only effect will be to protect your baby in the womb. If you are protected against rubella, you can't pass the infection onto your unborn child.

I am breast feeding my baby, and need to have MMR and have read that the vaccine can get into my breast milk and cause autism.

There is no scientific evidence that suggests that breast milk can cause a child to become autistic, irrespective of the health or vaccination status of the mother.

If vaccines like MMR went into a baby's stomach they would be broken down and have no effect by that route.

MMR is used to protect unprotected women of childbearing age against rubella in countries such as the US, and the use of MMR is in line with the World Health Organization's recommendations.

What happens in other countries?

Other countries use MMR as the internationally recognised vaccine of choice against measles, mumps and rubella diseases as a two-dose schedule in childhood and as protection for women of childbearing age not previously protected against rubella.

What about the World Health Organization?

WHO strongly supports the use of MMR vaccine on the grounds of its convincing record of safety and efficacy. Using MMR to protect women of childbearing age is in line with WHO recommendations.

I am trying for a baby and I don't know if I have been vaccinated for rubella. Can I ask my GP or clinic for a test?

Yes, you can ask your GP or clinic for a test to check your rubella antibody before becoming pregnant. This is a wise move particularly if you can't remember if you've been vaccinated. But if you don't have rubella antibody and need a dose of MMR, make sure that you avoid getting pregnant for one month after the jab.

I am recently pregnant and a friend has just said her youngster's got rubella. What should I do?

You should make an appointment with either your midwife or GP, who will arrange for a blood test if necessary to check whether you have rubella antibody. If you have rubella antibody, then you are protected and need not worry. If you haven't then your midwife or GP will advise you appropriately.