

Rubella is a viral infection characterized by fever, headache, swollen lymph nodes, aching joints, and a distinctive red rash. Although it is sometimes called German measles or three-day measles, it is not caused by the same virus that causes measles. Rubella is generally mild in children and more severe but not life-threatening in adults. However, if a pregnant woman is infected with rubella, it can cause serious problems for the unborn child. In the United States, most children receive the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine, and therefore the disease has become uncommon. In March 2005, health officials announced that rubella has been eliminated from the United States. However, it is still important for Americans to vaccinate their children, and women who are pregnant or might get pregnant still need to be sure they are immune, because the disease exists elsewhere. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nine rubella cases were reported in the United States in 2004, and all of them originated in other countries. Rubella affects males and females in equal numbers. During 1964 and 1965, according to the CDC, a rubella epidemic in the United States caused an estimated 12.5 million cases of rubella and 20,000 cases of congenital rubella syndrome, which led to more than 11,600 babies born deaf, 11,250 fetal deaths, 2,100 neonatal deaths, 3,580 babies born blind, and 1,800 babies born mentally retarded. Since 1969, the rubella virus has been included in the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine routinely given to babies and young children. Since the rubella rash is so much like rashes caused by other viruses, the definitive diagnosis is made on the basis of blood tests for the presence of the virus.