

Cessation of screening for rubella susceptibility in pregnancy

1 June 2016

What is Rubella?

- Rubella (German measles) is a viral infection that used to be common in children. Symptoms include:
 - a red-pink skin rash of small spots
 - swollen glands around the head and neck
 - fever and cold and flu-like symptoms
- Rubella gets better without treatment in 7 to 10 days and is usually a mild infection.
- However, if a woman gets rubella in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, her baby has a 9 in 10 chance of problems that include heart defects, cataracts and deafness.
- The risk is much lower if infection occurs later in pregnancy

Why are we stopping screening?

- The decision follows reviews of evidence by the UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) in 2003 and 2012.
- On both occasions it found that screening for rubella susceptibility in pregnancy did not meet the criteria for a screening programme.
 - ❖ Screening test result does not address risk in current pregnancy
 - ❖ Low-level antibodies detected at screening are probably protective
 - ❖ the test may falsely reassure women that they are not susceptible to rubella infection in the current pregnancy
 - ❖ MMR uptake rates are high again

Key Points

- High MMR uptake in children is primary mechanism for preventing rubella infection in pregnancy, by preventing circulation of infection
- Rubella has been virtually eliminated from the UK
- Few cases of rubella infection in pregnancy, or congenital rubella in recent years
- Antenatal rubella screening was for susceptibility only to identify those needing MMR post-partum.
- Ensuring protection prior to pregnancy is preferable

Investigation of possible Rubella in pregnancy

- Individual pregnant women with specific signs, symptoms or rubella contact require investigative or diagnostic **testing**
- Screening test is not appropriate or helpful in these circumstances
- No effective treatment to prevent transmission of maternal rubella to the fetus



The practicalities of cessation

- The offer of antenatal screening should stop for all women in Scotland **booking on or after 1 June 2016**
- Screening for HIV, hepatitis B and syphilis should continue to be offered and recommended to all eligible women
- **The rubella screening pathway should be completed for women booking and accepting screening before 1 June, meaning:**
 - **Laboratories will test decreasing numbers of samples over summer 2016 and will need to adjust assay supplies accordingly**
 - **Continued reporting and follow-up of results for women booking into this cohort by screening teams**
 - **Continued administration of postnatal MMR by maternity services and referral to primary care for second vaccination for non-immune women in this booking cohort**

Other considerations

- Discuss immunisations in pregnancy at booking
- Advise women to check their MMR status with their GP practice
- Highlight to the woman the importance of reporting rash illness or contact with rash illness during their pregnancy to their midwife or GP
- Postnatally signpost women to their GP to check their MMR status and if required be offered postnatal vaccination
- Reassure women that the MMR vaccine can be given to breastfeeding mothers without any risk to their baby


Rash Awareness

- Need for health professionals and women to be aware of **rare** but continuing risk of rubella in pregnancy, particularly for women born or who have lived outwith the UK who may not have been immunised
- Improve awareness of rash illness in pregnancy, and appropriate management. Health Protection Agency guidance





Supporting resources

- Updated protocols
- Updated “Your guide to screening tests during pregnancy
- Updated Ready Steady Baby
- Updated Screening pathway



Important changes to the pregnancy screening programme

Use updated versions of *Your guide to screening tests during pregnancy* and *Ready Steady Baby* for women booking on or after 1 June 2016



- From 1 June 2016, the NHS in Scotland will no longer offer screening during pregnancy for rubella (German measles) susceptibility.
- Please use the updated versions of these booklets for all women booking pregnancies from 1 June 2016 onwards. Look out for 2016 on the cover of *Your guide to screening tests during pregnancy* and check page 36 of *Ready Steady Baby* has a sticker covering the out-of-date information.
- Please return any out-of-date booklets to your local health promotion department (contact details overleaf).

For further copies of the updated publications, please contact your local health promotion department (contact details overleaf).

