



## Human pathogen information sheet – hygiene keeps you safe!

### What are Ringel rubella?

Ringel rubella are caused by viruses. In addition to scarlet fever, measles, chickenpox and rubella, they are one of the five childhood diseases that cause rash. Ringel rubella only share their name with rubella. The two diseases are caused by different pathogens. The Ringel rubella viruses (*Parvovirus B 19*) occur only in humans. Often, Ringel rubella progress without being noticed or like a slight cold. If a pregnant woman falls ill, however, the unborn child can suffer damage. In nurseries and schools, cases occur most often in late winter to early summer. Only persons who have never had Ringel rubella before can catch them. After having the disease once, you will be protected throughout your life. You cannot catch it again.

### How do Ringel rubella spread?

#### *Person-to-person*

When sneezing, coughing or speaking, tiny spittle droplets are passed on from person to person in the air. The viruses can also be passed on via the hands, e.g. when a patient sneezes into his hands and then shakes hands with a healthy person. From the hand, the pathogens can then be spread on the mucous membranes of nose or mouth and cause contagion.

Pregnant women may pass on the pathogens to their unborn child, depending on whether the mother develops symptoms or the disease progresses without being noticed. The unborn child is highly endangered by this.

#### *Via contaminated objects*

The pathogens are highly resistant in the environment as well. Affected objects such as door handles or toys can spread the viruses and cause contagion.

#### *Via blood conserves*

In rare cases, transfer is possible by blood conserves contaminated with viruses.

### What symptoms do the patients show?

Usually, Ringel rubella do not show any symptoms at all or occur like a cold with slight fever, swelling of the lymph nodes and feeling unwell. Only every fifth to sixth patient will develop the typical skin rash. In this case, an even reddening on both cheeks occurs approx. 2 weeks after contagion. A little later, garland or ring-shaped large red spots occur on the shoulders, upper arms, thighs and buttocks, without being painful or itching. The rash may change its form over time and will disappear after 7 to 10 days.

*Complications* are rare. Usually, Ringel rubella heal completely on their own. Rarely, there will be joint problems or joint inflammation, particularly in young women or girls. In persons with immune deficiency or certain blood conditions such as thalassaemia or sickle cell anaemia, the disease may occasionally cause dangerous anaemia.

### What's the incubation period – and how long are you contagious?

The time between the infection and the first symptoms is approx. 2 weeks (7 – 21 days). The danger of infection for others is highest in the days before the skin rash appears, i.e. while the patient does not know that he is sick yet. Once the rash appears, the patient usually is no longer contagious. Even if the Ringel rubella occur without any symptoms at all, the patient will be contagious for a few days.





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### Who is most at risk?

Mostly children between 5 and 15 years will catch Ringel rubella. Older teens and adults may catch it as well. Among adults, the otherwise usually mild disease will often have a more severe progress.

Particularly pregnant women who have not had Ringel rubella before and therefore do not have any special defences against Ringel rubella are in danger. The viruses may be transferred to the unborn child during pregnancy, and particularly during the first trimester. Blood production of the unborn child may be damaged in a life-threatening manner. Miscarriage or stillbirth may be the consequence of this.

Persons with immune deficiencies or chronic diseases of the blood system are in danger as well.

### What to do in case of illness?

- ▶ The symptoms usually do not need to be treated, since the disease is usually harmless particularly in children. The patients should stay in bed if they suffer from fever, muscle or joint pain.
- ▶ Patients should not cough or sneeze into their hands. The best option is to use disposable handkerchiefs that are disposed of immediately after being used. Patients should then wash their hands thoroughly.
- ▶ Pregnant women who have had contact with Ringel rubella patients should seek medical advice from their local GP or attending doctor as soon as possible.
- ▶ The staff in children's facilities and schools must be informed of possible danger from Ringel rubella when starting their work.
- ▶ Some Federal states recommend general work prohibition for pregnant women in facilities for children younger than school age if they have no protection against Ringel rubella.

### How can I protect myself?

It is very difficult to protect yourself from Ringel rubella, since the danger of infection is highest before the first symptoms occur. In contrast to rubella, there is no vaccine against Ringel rubella. Since Ringel rubella are transferred through droplets in the air and on the hands, simple hygiene measures around patients may reduce the risk of infection.

This includes:

- ▶ Avoid contact with persons who may have become infected.
- ▶ Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with water and soap.
- ▶ Do not touch your face and specifically your mouth, nose and eyes with unwashed hands.
- ▶ Pregnant women who have never had Ringel rubella before should not enter nurseries and schools where there is a case of Ringel rubella.
- ▶ Before you plan to get pregnant, have tests performed to see if you are immune to Ringel rubella. Do so particularly if you have any contact with school or nursery aged children.

### Where can I find out more?

Your local health authority can provide you with further advice. You will find information and much experience in handling of diseases there.

More information on the illness itself is also available online from the Robert Koch Institute ([www.kinderaerzte-im-netz.de](http://www.kinderaerzte-im-netz.de)).

For information on how hygiene can guard against infection, please visit the Federal Centre for Health Education website ([www.infektionsschutz.de](http://www.infektionsschutz.de)).



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