



Australian Government

**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

Rubella in Australia

Quick facts

Rubella usually causes a mild illness, but infection in pregnant women can cause serious life-long complications in her infant.

Rates of congenital rubella syndrome have dropped since vaccination was introduced.

What is rubella?

Rubella (also known German measles) is a viral disease. For most people, a rubella infection causes mild illness of fever, rash and swollen lymph glands. However, if a woman is infected with rubella early in her pregnancy, there is a risk of miscarriage or the unborn baby developing severe birth defects known as congenital rubella syndrome (CRS). These problems may include lifelong deafness, blindness, heart defects and intellectual disabilities.

Rubella can be spread from an infected person when they cough or sneeze.

Vaccination against rubella

Widespread vaccination against rubella for school girls and non-immune women was introduced in Australia in 1971. The Australian National Immunisation Program (NIP) first included measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine in 1989. The NIP provides MMR vaccine for infants and a combined MMR-varicella (MMR-V) vaccine for young children.

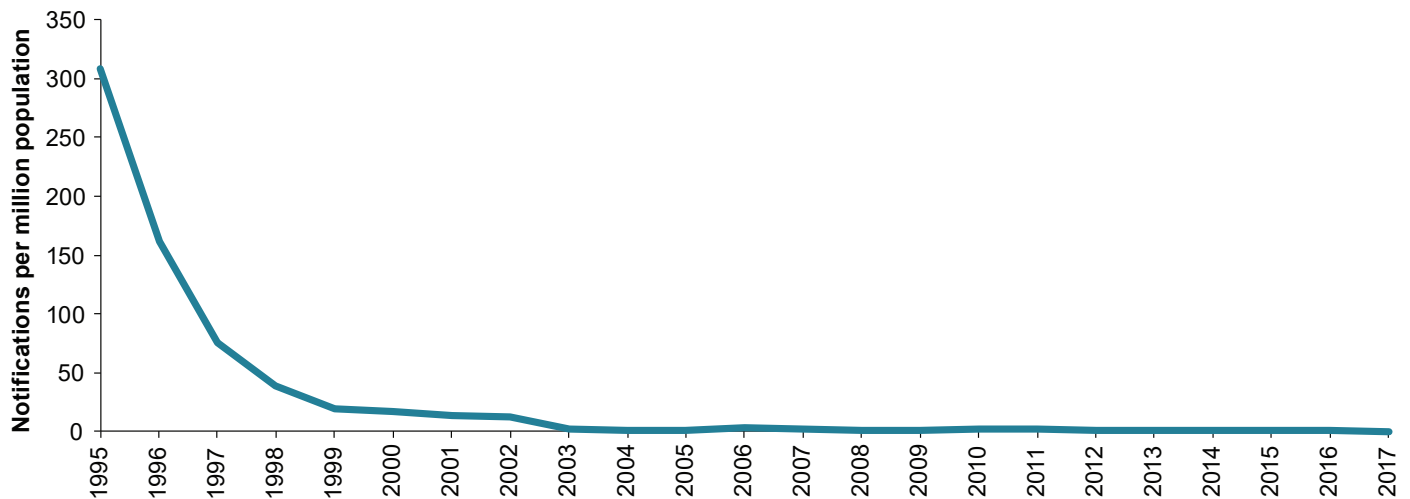
Australia was declared free of rubella in 2018, which means that there is no ongoing local transmission of rubella within the population (although the infection can still be brought in from overseas and can spread to unvaccinated people), and a system is in place to detect cases. Although congenital rubella infection is now rare in Australia, vaccination is still important because rubella infections still occur in Australia and most other countries. Unvaccinated pregnant women can still be exposed to rubella, especially when travelling. Testing for rubella immunity before pregnancy, and vaccinating if needed, is important for protecting women and their unborn children against rubella.

In 2017, 93% of Australian 2 year olds were fully vaccinated against rubella; however, vaccination rates vary by where a child lives.

Rubella notifications

Rubella is a nationally notifiable disease in Australia, which means that diagnosed cases of rubella are reported to state or territory health departments.

There were 10 notifications of rubella in Australia in 2017. Notification rates fell significantly after the introduction of a second dose of MMR for school aged children in 1992. Since 1995, there have been a total of 20 CRS cases reported. Most cases were infants born to overseas-born women.



Source: AIHW analysis of NNDSS data extracted on 03 August 2018.

Hospitalisations and deaths due to rubella

Between 2004 and 2016, there were an average of 4 hospitalisations per year for rubella and less than 1 per year for CRS. This compares to an average of 30 per year between 1994 and 2003 for rubella and 5 per year for CRS.

In Australia, between 1997 and 2016, rubella caused 2 deaths in adults aged over 30. Over the same period, CRS caused 1 death in a child aged under one, and 12 deaths in adults aged over 30 who had lived their entire lives with the consequences of congenital infection.

This fact sheet is part of the [Vaccine-preventable diseases](#) release. For more information see [Immunisation](#) on the AIHW website.

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