

MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors & Health Journalists
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Department calls for child immunisation against increasing rubella cases

Pretoria: The Department of Health urges parents and caregivers to ensure children are up to date with vaccination schedule against serious diseases that are prevented by vaccines as the country is experiencing an increase in rubella cases in some provinces.

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) has alerted the Department of notable rising number of rubella cases in various parts of Gauteng, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

Rubella, otherwise known as German measles, is an infectious disease caused by the rubella virus. It is usually a mild disease in children and adults but can have serious consequences in pregnant women by infecting their unborn babies and causing congenital rubella syndrome.

The disease primarily spreads through respiratory droplets from coughing or sneezing and can also be transmitted from mother to foetus during pregnancy. It generally causes a mild illness in children and adults, characterized by a low-grade fever, rash, and sometimes joint pain. It can lead to congenital rubella syndrome in the foetus, resulting in death, miscarriages, stillbirth or severe birth defects in infants. The incubation period of rubella ranges from 14 to 21 days.

In recent weeks, the Department has received enquiries following a closure of schools in the Northern Cape after a rubella case was detected amongst school learners. Although, proactive and effective measures to prevent further spread of the disease are always recommended, but the school closure should only be implemented as the last resort after all measures have been employed.

Children who develop symptoms (including nausea, sore throat, red eyes and swollen lymph nodes in the neck) compatible with rubella should be treated symptomatically and remain away from school until they recover. All suspected rubella cases should be reported to the nearest health facility or healthcare provider, who will then notify the Department using the Notifiable Medical Conditions reporting platforms.

The Department is currently rolling-out the measles-rubella vaccine as part of the Expanded Programme of Immunisation. This combined vaccine replaces the standalone measles vaccine and is administered at 6 and 12 months of age. In the private sector, rubella protection is included in the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine, which is typically given between 12 and 15 months of age.

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