Rubella outbreaks in Japan, Poland prompt CDC travel alerts

Two new travel health notices have been posted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in response to outbreaks of rubella (German measles) in Japan and Poland.

The CDC is urging unvaccinated pregnant women to avoid travel to the two countries because of the outbreaks.

In Japan, more than 8,500 laboratory-confirmed rubella cases have been reported in 2013, with the reports increasing in the last few months. The number of cases is expected to rise, especially since the peak period for rubella in Japan is spring and summer, the CDC reports.

In Poland, more than 26,000 cases have been reported this year. The entire country is affected, but the western region has been especially hard hit, according to the CDC.

Physicians should make sure patients traveling to Japan and Poland have received their updated rubella vaccine. Pregnant women in particular should use caution because rubella infection can have serious health consequences, including miscarriages, stillbirths and severe birth defects in infants. All pregnant women should talk with their physician before traveling to Japan or Poland to make sure they are protected.

In the United States, the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) and measles-mumps-rubella-varicella (MMRV) vaccines protect against rubella. Children should receive the MMR vaccine at age 12-15 months and receive two doses at least 28 days apart.

Travelers should make sure to practice good hygiene, including frequently washing hands with soap and water, covering their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and avoiding contact with people who are sick.


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