

Rashes to Research

SCIENTISTS AND PARENTS CONFRONT
THE 1964 RUBELLA EPIDEMIC



Rubella is a viral infection. Symptoms of rubella include a cold-like illness with a low fever followed by a rash.

Detail of "Differential
Diagnosis of Rash Illnesses,"
Merck Sharp & Dohme, 1983

Courtesy U.S. National Library
of Medicine

FRONT COVER

Dr. Harry M. Meyer, Jr. (left), Hope Hopps (center), and Dr.
Paul Parkman (right) working with the rubella antigen,
photograph by Jerry Hecht, Bethesda, Maryland, ca. 1970

Courtesy U.S. National Library of Medicine



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The U.S. National Library of Medicine
produced this exhibition.
Guest curator: Ashley Bowen, PhD
Exhibition designer: HealyKohler Design

www.nlm.nih.gov/rashestoresearch

Pregnant women used to fear rubella.

Women who were pregnant and caught rubella during their first trimester had a high probability of miscarriage or delivering a baby with congenital rubella syndrome (CRS).



Rubella, Jane Lin-Fu, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, DC, 1970

Courtesy U.S. National Library of Medicine

During the rubella epidemic that raged in 1964-1965, 20,000 children were born with serious heart, hearing, and vision problems related to rubella exposure during pregnancy.

Some of the parents of children born with CRS became early advocates on behalf of people with disabilities when they insisted on adequate medical care and equal educational opportunities for their kids.

Photograph of Dortha Jacobs Biggs holding her daughter, Lesli, 1977

Courtesy Dortha Biggs

The nation's scientists rushed to create a vaccine and develop better screening tests.



Dr. Harry M. Meyer, Jr. (left) and Dr. Paul Parkman (right) work on rubella research with help from scientist Hope Hopps (center), photograph by Jerry Hecht, Bethesda, Maryland, ca. 1970

Courtesy U.S. National Library of Medicine

Afraid of the consequences of rubella, parents eagerly enrolled their children in the vaccination program.

Two researchers at the National Institutes of Health, Doctors Harry Meyer, Jr. and Paul Parkman, (pictured with scientist Hope Hopps), developed a vaccine and blood test to screen people for rubella.



“After 1969 no more big rubella epidemics...”

– Dr. Paul Parkman

Demand for the shot was immense; public health professionals vaccinated almost 40 million children in the United States against rubella in just over four years.

“Vaccination for German Measles,” Merck & Co. Inc, Danbury, Connecticut, 1969

Courtesy U.S. National Library of Medicine