

11, 1965

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1965

## RUBELLA'S SPREAD IS LAID TO BABIES

Persistence of Virus Called Peril to Pregnant Women

By JOHN A. OSMUNDSEN

A team of New York University doctors has found that babies who contract German measles long before birth can spread the viruses for long afterward without showing signs of infection.

This ability of the virus to persist and be shed in such a manner was called a hazard to nurses, wives of doctors and friends of the contagious infants' mothers who thereby unwittingly risk infection when they might be in an early stage of pregnancy, perhaps unknowingly.

The danger comes from the ability of the virus to produce birth defects, such as heart disease and cataracts, in babies whose mothers contracted German measles—or rubella—during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

It is not yet understood just how the rubella virus causes such calamities.

They do not happen every time a pregnant woman is infected during the critical period, either. The risk of birth defects from rubella infection in the first trimester is about 20 per cent, or roughly 10 times greater than the normal incidence.

However, some studies put the risk even higher, at around 50 per cent.

The New York University discovery of virus-shedding babies came from a study of more than 100 infants with birth defects thought to be from rubella infection. The cases came from several hospitals throughout the metropolitan area.

### Other Abnormalities

In addition to the two "classical" defects already mentioned, the doctors found other more obscure abnormalities that seemed to be associated with rubella infection during early development. Those included a condition called thrombocytopenic purpura, which is a kind of subcutaneous bleeding, and splenomegaly, or enlargement of the spleen.

The doctors found that 60 to 70 per cent of those babies with such conditions were excreting viruses from throat and urine, according to a report prepared by the group for the United States Public Health Service.

The report was presented orally before the New York Academy of Medicine Thursday evening by Dr. Louis Z. Cooper.

Collaborating with him on the study were Dr. Robert H. Green, Dr. Saul Krugman, Dr. Joan P. Giles and Dr. George S. Mirick, all from the departments of medicine and pediatrics at the university's School of Medicine.

It was through the questioning of nursery and pediatric personnel who had cared for the unfortunate infants that the team found eight nurses and one resident physician who had developed conditions typical of rubella two to three weeks after close and prolonged physical contact with the babies, Dr. Cooper said.

### Isolation Is Urged

As a consequence of this discovery and the hazard it implies, the doctors recommended that infants born with anomalies like those associated with rubella infection be treated with the same precautions used for patients with the frank infection—meaning they should be isolated.

In a telephone interview, Dr. Krugman indicated that it might be wise to test for virus shedding even those babies who showed no such signs of damage but whose mothers had been exposed to rubella while pregnant, inasmuch as they might harbor the infectious agents, too.

Dr. Krugman noted that last year produced one of the nation's worst rubella epidemics on record.

The normal incidence of the reported cases in the metropolitan area is 2,000 to 3,000, he said.

Those reported last year—mostly between January and June numbered 21,292, or almost a 10-fold increase. He estimated that 10 times the number of reported cases actually occur, which would put last year's load of rubella infections here at around 200,000.