

b A cluster of rubella cases in Limpopo Province

On 18 December 2015, a general practitioner (GP) from a district in Limpopo Province alerted the NICD of an increase in the number of patients presenting with a fever and a maculopapular rash. At the time there were 9 cases of which 2 were adults. All had presented within a week. According to the alert, none of the patients had cough, coryza or conjunctivitis. Initial serology tests done by the GP on two of the patients were IgM negative for measles and rubella. NICD clinicians suspected rubella, enterovirus or parvovirus infection. A case investigation form (CIF) was drawn up, and epidemiological data and blood samples collected for analysis.

Of the 11 cases, 5 CIFs were completed. Four cases were under the age of 3 years (range 6 months – 27 months), and the fifth case was an adult of 25 years old. In all the cases, the rash was itchy. Three had occipital nodes. None of them had joint pain or arthralgia. Except for the adult case whose two children also had similar symptoms without the rash, there was no epidemiological linkage of note. In all, the disease process was mild with no hospital admissions. A blood specimen from one of the cases was sent to the NICD for serology testing. Rubella IgM tested positive and measles IgM was negative. A final diagnosis of rubella was likely as a

cause of this cluster of cases.

Rubella is common in South Africa and may be confused with measles. It is an acute viral infection which occurs most often in children but can also be seen in adults. It is caused by rubella virus, a member of the Rubivirus genus of the Togaviridae family. It is spread in droplets when infected persons cough or sneeze. The incubation period is 12 to 23 days. It is generally a benign infectious disease with age being the most important determinant of disease severity. In most cases, no treatment is required. In pregnant women however, incident rubella infection may lead to birth defects (congenital rubella syndrome) or foetal death.

References: WHO | Rubella.

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs367/en/>. Accessed January 19, 2015.

Source: Division of Public Health Surveillance and Response, NICD-NHLS (outbreak@nicd.ac.za); Centre