



Measles

Protecting children from measles with the MMR vaccination





The number of children catching measles in the UK was the highest level seen for over ten years. To be protected a child needs two doses of MMR vaccine. Children of any age who have missed MMR vaccination can still have the vaccine to protect them from getting measles infection.

Why is measles on the rise?

By the mid 1990s the spread of measles in the UK had been stopped by high uptake of MMR vaccine. From 1998 the claims of a small number of researchers about the safety of the vaccine received a lot of attention in the press and media. Although those claims have been completely discredited, the children of many parents who decided against MMR at the time still remain unvaccinated. Uptake of pre-school children is now close to the high levels seen in the mid 1990s. However, it has been estimated that there are about 80,000 school children in Wales who have missed one or both doses of MMR. It is among these older groups that measles easily spreads.

Is measles serious?

Yes, measles can be serious and is caused by a very infectious virus. Nearly everyone who catches it will become ill with a high fever and a rash. On average, a child with measles will have to spend about five days in bed and may be off school for about ten days. Adults are likely to be ill for longer.

About one in every 15 people who have measles will develop more serious complications. These can include diarrhoea, ear infections, chest infections, fits, encephalitis (inflammation/swelling of the brain), and brain damage. Measles can kill and worldwide 200,000 children still die from measles every year

Could my child die from measles?

Studies show that for every 1,000 individuals who catch measles, as many as one to three may die due to the infection or its complications.

Tragically, two young people have died from measles in the UK in recent years. One 13 year old in 2006 and a 17 year old in June 2008 – both had problems with their immune systems so had not had the MMR vaccination.

With good uptake of the vaccine in the general population, then children like these who are vulnerable to infection will also be better protected from measles, mumps and rubella.

Is my child at risk?

Measles is one of the most infectious diseases known. A cough or a sneeze can spread the measles virus over a wide area. Because it's so infectious, your child will face a lifelong risk of catching measles if they are not protected by vaccination. So it's likely that sooner or later, your child will get measles if he or she remains unprotected.

The risk is greatest in children who have received no MMR vaccine. Children who have only had one vaccination need a second dose of the vaccine to complete the course and ensure they are fully protected. Some children cannot have MMR because they have conditions that weaken the immune system, such as leukaemia. These children can only be protected if enough healthy children are vaccinated so that the spread of measles is prevented.

What should I do?

The safest and most effective way to prevent measles is to ensure your child is fully vaccinated with MMR vaccine. Your child should be routinely vaccinated at 13 months of age and again at three years and four months or soon after. If your child has missed one (or both) of these vaccinations, you should contact your GP practice to make an appointment for the vaccination.

It is important your child completes the full course of MMR and has two vaccinations. It is never too late to have your child vaccinated.

I can't remember whether my child has had an MMR vaccination or not

Check your child's personal health record (the Red Book). This may have a record of which vaccinations your child has had. If you are still unsure, contact your GP practice and ask their advice.

If there is any doubt it is better to have the vaccination. An additional dose poses no serious risk to your child's health if they've already had one or even two MMR vaccinations.



My child had single measles, mumps and rubella vaccinations, can they still have MMR?

Yes, when a child has not been vaccinated against any one of these diseases, we recommend two doses of MMR. If parents are not sure whether their children have been effectively protected with single vaccines, MMR can still be given to them. It is safe for your child to have two doses of MMR even if some single vaccinations have been given. You can discuss this with your doctor, health visitor or practice nurse.

I'm still anxious about giving my child three vaccines in one injection

A child's immune system appears designed to respond to a wide range of germs and infections from birth onwards. Responding to vaccinations uses only a tiny part of this built-in ability to respond to an immunity challenge - even crawling on a clean floor is a much greater challenge to their immune system than combined vaccines like MMR.

Having the course of two doses of MMR vaccine will protect your child against the three diseases of measles, mumps and rubella. These three diseases can all have particularly serious consequences in young adults.

Does the MMR vaccination have any side effects?

All vaccinations can cause mild side effects, such as soreness at the site of injection. The three viruses in the MMR vaccine act at different times and may produce the following side effects after the first dose:

- six to eleven days after the immunisation, about one in ten children may develop a mild fever and some develop a measles-like rash and go off their food. This can happen when the measles part of the vaccine starts to work, and generally lasts two to three days;
- about one in every 1,000 immunised children may have a fit caused by a fever. This is called a 'febrile convulsion', and can follow fever due to any cause, not just vaccination. However, if a child who has not been immunised catches measles, they are five times more likely to have a fit;
- rarely, children may get mumps-like symptoms (fever and swollen glands) about two to three weeks after their immunisation as the mumps part of the vaccine starts to work;
- very rarely, children may get a rash of small bruise-like spots in the six weeks following vaccination. This usually resolves itself. If you see spots like these, take your child to the doctor to be checked. He or she will tell you how to deal with the rash; and
- fewer than one child in a million develops encephalitis (inflammation/swelling of the brain) after vaccination and there is very little evidence that it is actually caused by the vaccine. However, the risk of developing

encephalitis after catching measles is between one in 200 and one in 5,000.

Your doctor, practice nurse or health visitor will be able to discuss these issues in more detail.

What about reactions after the second MMR?

The same reactions as listed above can occur, but they are much less likely to happen.

I still worry that MMR can cause autism

MMR vaccine has been used widely and safely around the world for more than 30 years. Over 500 million doses have been given to children in over 100 countries. The original study that suggested a link has now been completely discredited. An enormous amount of research was carried out to investigate the alleged link and there is now overwhelming evidence that MMR does not cause autism. MMR is as safe as all the other routine vaccines we give our children to protect them from serious infectious diseases.

My child is allergic to eggs – can they have the MMR vaccine?

The MMR vaccine can safely be given to children who have had a severe allergy (anaphylactic reaction) to egg. If you have any concerns, talk to your practice nurse, health visitor or doctor.



MMR is the safest way to protect your child against measles and you'll be protecting them against mumps and rubella as well

Where can I get more information?

You can speak to your doctor, health visitor or practice nurse, or phone

NHS Direct Wales on 0845 46 47.

Visit: **www.mmrthefacts.nhs.uk** and
www.immunisation.nhs.uk
(for detailed information on the
measles-containing MMR vaccine.)

This leaflet is available on the Welsh Assembly
Government immunisation website:

**[http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/health/
protection/immunisation/leaflets/?lang=en](http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/health/protection/immunisation/leaflets/?lang=en)**

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