

**MEASLES ALERT
ALL PARENTS
PLEASE READ THIS NOTICE**

We should like to alert parents to the fact that cases of measles are on the increase. Immunisation with MMR vaccine is the safest way to protect vulnerable children and young adults against measles, mumps and rubella which are diseases that can have serious consequences for babies, young children and young adults.

The Health Protection Agency and the Department of Health recommend that all children receive the first dose of the MMR vaccination at about the age of 13 months and a second dose at 3 yrs 4 months - 5 years.

MMR vaccination is available to all children and can be obtained from their GP free of charge. Parents should be advised that if they wish to discuss this further, they should contact their own doctor.

Frequently asked Questions about measles

What is measles?

- Measles is an acute infection caused by the measles virus.

Who catches measles?

- Measles is usually a childhood infection and is most common in the 1-4 year old age group in children who have not been immunised. However, people can catch measles at any age.
- Epidemics often coincide with school terms when there is more close contact between children.

How do you catch measles?

- Measles is caught through direct contact with an infected person or through droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

How infectious is measles?

- About 90% of people who have not been immunised against measles or had a past measles infection develop the illness if they live in the same house as someone with measles.
- Measles is most infectious four days before the rash appears; and remains infectious for four days after the appearance of the rash. Even trivial contact may be sufficient for the virus to spread.

What are the symptoms and signs of measles?

- The time from being infected to the appearance of the first symptoms (incubation period) is 7-18 days (average 10 -12 days)
- Initial symptoms of measles include fever, irritability, a runny nose, conjunctivitis (red eyes) and cough. These symptoms may last up to 8 days.
- The rash develops 2 to 4 days after the onset of symptoms. The rash usually starts on the face and behind the ears and spreads downwards over the trunk and limbs.
- The rash is slightly raised and red with areas, which can flow into each other. It lasts 4-7 days.
- Complications include diarrhoea, vomiting, abdominal pain, ear infections and pneumonia.

How serious is measles?

- One million children die from measles worldwide each year. In the UK measles cases have increased annually since 2003 because of a decrease in the uptake of MMR vaccine. Measles is circulating again in the community; in London there have been significant outbreaks of measles since March 2006. In 2008 over 1000 measles cases have been confirmed in London compared with only 33 in 2005.
- Measles is a highly infectious and dangerous illness, and as there is increased close contact in institutions such as schools and nurseries, it can spread easily
- Complications are quite common and may result in hospitalisation. They include a severe cough and breathing difficulties, ear infections, viral and bacterial lung infections (pneumonia), and eye infections (conjunctivitis). Most are caused by secondary bacterial infections which can be treated with antibiotics
- One of the most serious problems is acute encephalitis, which is inflammation of the brain and can occur 2-6 days after the rash has appeared. This affects less than 1 in 1000 measles cases, but 25% are left with brain damage.
- SSPE (subacute sclerosing pan-encephalomyelitis) is the most severe complication of measles. It is rare, occurring in less than 1 in 100,000 cases of measles. It usually occurs years after the initial illness and is a slowly progressive degenerative condition of the nervous system which causes death. SSPE occurs only after infection with wild measles virus and MMR vaccine offers protection against this fatal complication.
- Severe disease and complications are most likely in infants under 12 months and those with a weakened immune system.
- There is a group of people (including children) who are immunocompromised who cannot be given MMR. They include those with cancer, leukaemia and high dose steroids. Measles in these cases can be deadly; improving uptake of MMR vaccine in the community will help to prevent spread of measles to these and other vulnerable groups
- Measles infection in pregnancy can lead to loss or early birth of the baby, but is not associated with congenital infection or damage.

Can you prevent measles?

- Measles can be prevented by a highly effective and safe measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. The first dose is usually given at 12-15 months and a second dose at 3yrs and 4months to 5 yrs.
- Pregnant women or those with weakened immune systems should not be immunised.
- Past infection gives immunity.
- A successful immunisation programme is essential to prevent measles cases in the UK. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has set a goal of the global eradication of measles by 2005-2010. This needs over 95% of all people to be immunised.

How soon should a child be back at school after measles?

- Measles is most infectious from 4 days before the appearance of the rash and remains infectious 4 days afterwards. The Health Protection Agency and Department of Health guidelines on infection control in schools and nurseries recommend that a child should be **excluded from school for 5 days after the onset of the rash.**
- **Measles is a notifiable disease and must be reported by a doctor to the local Health Protection Unit (HPU).**
- **The local HPU will provide a special saliva test kit to confirm or refute the diagnosis.**

How can you treat someone with measles?

- There is no specific treatment for measles. The patient should drink lots of clear fluid to replace body water lost through the fever.
- Paracetamol can be used to reduce the fever. Aspirin should NOT be given to children as its use is associated with Reye's syndrome (a severe neurological disorder).
- Children with measles should be closely monitored for complications.
- Consult your GP for medical advice.

Further information about measles and MMR vaccination may be sought from www.immunisation.nhs.uk/Vaccines/MMR or from NHS Direct on 08454647