



## News Release

THURSDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2023

### West Midlands measles cases prompt MMR vaccination call

People in the West Midlands are being urged to check that they, and all family members are up to date with their MMR vaccine, following confirmation that measles is circulating in the region.

Since 1 October 2023, there have been 19 confirmed cases in the West Midlands, with an increasing number of likely cases.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) West Midlands is working with local authorities and local NHS partners to make sure that anyone in the region who needs an MMR vaccination is aware that there is an increased risk of catching measles, following confirmed cases in Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry.

**Paul Fisher, UKHSA West Midlands Consultant in Health Protection, said:** “We are currently seeing cases of measles across the country, including the West Midlands region. Measles is very infectious and can spread rapidly among communities, such as schools, if people have not had at least one dose of the MMR vaccine.

“Uptake of the MMR vaccine in the West Midlands is much lower than the 95% needed to protect the population, which is giving this serious disease a chance to get a foothold in our communities, so it’s really important that anyone who hasn’t already had two doses of the MMR vaccine by the time they started full time school, contacts their GP surgery for an appointment to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

“While most people will recover completely within a couple of weeks, the virus can cause very serious illness – sometimes this can leave permanent disability and it can even be fatal. People in certain at-risk groups, including babies and small children, pregnant women, and people with weakened immunity, are at increased risk of complications if they catch measles.”

The individuals currently affected are all recovering, but hospital treatment was necessary for a few. Most of the measles cases we're seeing have had no doses of the MMR vaccine. One dose of MMR is at least 95% effective in preventing measles and the second dose gives maximum protection.

**Symptoms of measles appear 7-10 days after contact with the virus and include:**

- cold-like symptoms such as runny or blocked nose, sneezing and cough
- red, sore, watery eyes
- high temperature (fever), which may reach around 40°C / 104°F
- a non-itchy, red-brown rash usually appears 3-5 days later (sometimes starts around the ears before spreading to rest of the body), spots may be raised and join to form blotchy patches – which may be harder to see on darker skin tones
- small white spots may appear inside cheeks and the back of lips (for a few days)

**Paul Fisher said:** “If you think you could have measles, it’s really important to stay away from areas where you could come into contact with lots of other people – especially vulnerable patients in hospitals, care homes or other healthcare settings.

“If you have the symptoms of measles, it is **essential that you don’t just turn up at your GP practice, walk in centre or other healthcare setting.** Instead, you should contact your GP or NHS111 for advice. If you do need to visit your GP practice, walk-in centre or other healthcare setting, **please phone ahead so arrangements can be made to prevent other people being infected.**”

The MMR vaccine is part of the routine NHS schedule of childhood vaccines administered:

- **1st dose** just after the child’s first birthday
- **2nd dose** at 3 years 4 months and certainly before children start school full time

**Paul Fisher added:** “The MMR vaccine is free and a safe and effective way of protecting against measles, as well as mumps and rubella. If children and young adults have missed these vaccinations in the past, it’s important to take up the vaccine now from GPs, particularly in light of the recent cases. Check your child’s Red Book to see if they’ve received MMR vaccinations as scheduled or check with your GP surgery if you’re unsure. It’s never too late to get vaccinated against measles.”

**For more information contact UKHSA West Midlands press office on 0121 232 9223/4 Out Of Hours 07834 311 393**

## Notes to Editors

1. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is responsible for protecting every member of every community from the impact of infectious diseases, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents and other health threats. We provide intellectual, scientific and operational leadership at national and local level, as well as on the global stage, to make the nation's health secure. UKHSA is an executive agency, sponsored by the [Department of Health and Social Care](#).

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### 2. **About the MMR vaccine**

MMR is a highly effective and safe vaccine. Children should receive 2 doses of MMR for maximum protection. The vaccine not only protects them, but also limits the chances of the virus spreading more widely, for example to children who are too young to have the vaccine and to adults who may be more vulnerable to the disease.

The MMR vaccine is part of the routine NHS schedule of childhood vaccines administered:

- **1st dose** just after the child's first birthday
- **2nd dose** at 3 years 4 months and certainly before children start school full time

The MMR vaccine is safe and provides effective protection against three diseases – measles, mumps, and rubella. Two doses of MMR are required to produce the maximum protection. Anyone who is not up to date with their MMR vaccines should contact their GP to arrange an appointment.

For people who do not touch any pork products, there is a version of the MMR vaccine which does not use porcine gelatin in its production.

Further information on measles and the MMR vaccine can be found on the NHS website: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

3. More information about measles is available on the NHS website here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/measles/>
4. Further information about the MMR vaccine can be found on the NHS website here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/mmr-vaccine/>

### 5. **About measles**

#### **What is measles?**

Measles is a viral infection most commonly found in young children who have not been immunised. However, adults can also catch measles if they have not had it before or have not been immunised against it.

It begins with fever that lasts for a couple of days followed by a cough, runny nose and conjunctivitis (red, sore eyes). The rash starts on the face and upper neck, spreads down the upper body and then extends to the arms, hands, legs and feet. After about 5 days the rash starts to fade.

#### **How serious is measles?**

Measles is an unpleasant illness and easily passed from one person to another. In some people it can cause complications, such as ear infection, chest infections and even pneumonia. In very rare cases some people who get measles can develop serious complications, which can be fatal.

#### **How do you catch measles?**

The measles virus lives in the nose and throat of infected people. Measles is caught through direct contact with an infected person or through the air when he or she coughs or sneezes. **A person with measles can infect other people from the day before they become unwell until 4 days after the rash appears.**

### How is measles treated?

There is no specific treatment for measles, but measles can be prevented by a highly effective vaccine. This is part of the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) immunisation programme, with a first dose at 12-15 months and a second dose at 3-5 years.

**A scientific paper authored by Andrew Wakefield and 12 others, which appeared in the medical journal The Lancet in 1998 and implied a link between the MMR vaccine and autism, was disproved and retracted by the journal in 2010.**

### What to do to avoid passing on the infection:

Limit your contacts with other people, particularly those who are:

- pregnant
- children who are under 12 months or have not had the MMR vaccine
- people who have weak immune systems
- if you have measles, do not go to school or work for 5 days from when the rash first appeared and inform your school or employer immediately

### Who is at risk from complications?

Anyone can be susceptible to complications from measles; however complications resulting from measles are more likely to develop in some children, for example:

- children with a weakened immune system, such as those with leukaemia or HIV/AIDS
- children with a poor diet
- children under the age of 5 years

### ***Complications are also more likely to develop in adults who are over the age of 20***

Complications of measles include:

- pneumonia
- ear and eye infections
- croup (an infection of the lungs and throat)

### What if you're pregnant or planning to get pregnant?

If you are planning to get pregnant and you have not had measles yet, you should arrange with your GP to have the MMR vaccine. If you catch measles during pregnancy, it can be passed on to your baby and can be very damaging, or even fatal. Measles in pregnancy can cause miscarriage, premature labour or a baby with low birth weight. The MMR jab cannot be given during pregnancy.