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Measles Outbreak

Why are we worried?

There are cases of measles in mostly children but also adults within Birmingham. More people are being diagnosed every day and the outbreak is growing. This is not a normal scenario as it is decades since there was a measles outbreak in Birmingham.

What is measles?

Measles is a highly infectious viral infection, and it spreads very easily. It causes fever, cough, cold, sore eyes and rash. 10-20% of people will get complications, including ear infections, seizures, brain infections and death. We don't know who will get complications – but the youngest and those with existing medical problems tend to be worse affected. It's a viral infection so there's not much treatment we can provide if people do get it severely.

Measles makes children sicker than normal childhood viruses. They have fever for about 5 days running. They feel very poorly. As well as the complications above it weakens the immune system for 2 years after infection, so anyone who has had measles is then more likely to get serious infections in the 2 years after.

What is happening now?

Measles cases are happening to people who have not had the measles vaccination. This is given as the MMR vaccine. Many children missed their vaccinations during COVID and some people come from countries with weak health infrastructure and may not have been offered a measles vaccination.

Why have some people chosen to not vaccinate their children?

A doctor published a fraudulent research study in 12 children, 25 years ago, falsely linking the MMR vaccine with bowel problems and autism. Since then, many careful scientific studies with data from over 1.2 million children have completely disproved this. There is no link between autism and MMR. Tens of millions of children have the MMR vaccine each year across the world.

In 2021 it was estimated that 128,000 children died from measles, predominantly in countries with low per capita incomes or fragile healthcare infrastructures. Measles is a frequent cause of devastated lives and child loss worldwide.

Does MMR vaccine contain pork gelatin?

No, the MMR vaccine called PRIORIX contains no pork gelatin.

Does it matter if children get measles, if their parents have chosen to not vaccinate them?

We want children to be happy and healthy. If a child gets measles they will be ill for about a week. They will also receive a big knock to their immune system, which often takes up to two years to recover from, leaving them vulnerable to other infections including sepsis.

They will also spread the infection to anyone else who is susceptible.

The MMR vaccine does not work with young babies, which is why the NHS gives it to children after their first birthday. These young babies will be just as likely to catch the infection as anyone else, but they do not yet have the vaccine available to protect them. Children who are receiving cancer treatment, or immune suppressive treatment will be more at risk of getting ill with measles and cannot safely have the vaccine. Society needs to work together to protect the vulnerable. If all people who are allowed to safely have the vaccine do, then all of the vulnerable would be protected.

In our experience parents looking after children with measles are very worried about them. They never thought it would happen to them and have mostly not seen them this sick.

Measles can also look like some other medical problems in its early stages – like scarlet fever, sepsis and Kawasaki Disease. These are important to treat promptly. If children have had their measles vaccine we know they are safe and therefore are more likely to correctly identify other serious medical problems. Help us treat children safely.

When should children get their vaccine?

Children are invited for 2 MMR vaccines. They are given when the child is 1 year and 3y 4m old. The vaccines protect against 3 infections – mumps, measles and rubella. All are viral infections. If a child has had measles infection they still need 2 doses of vaccine to give them protection for mumps and rubella. If a parent isn't sure whether they've had the vaccine abroad, or they've got no documentation, then it is safe and good practice to vaccinate again (with the 2 vaccines). This is safe and will not harm anyone. If a child missed the vaccines, and the parents want to vaccinate – they need to book an appointment with the GP practice nurse as soon as possible. Catch up is easy and safe, and the child just needs 2 doses of the MMR vaccine one month apart. They will get some benefit of protection as soon as they have the vaccine.

What should a family do if they are worried their child has measles?

Measles spreads very easily and is one of the most contagious viruses in the world. People are contagious from 4 days before they get the rash, to 4 days after the appearance of the rash. One person who has measles tends to infect 9 out of 10 of their close contacts. That means if a family has 4 unvaccinated (and therefore at risk) children, it is likely that every one of them will catch measles from the one child that caught it first.

What are we asking for?

We are asking families who think their child may have measles to isolate and not attend nursery or healthcare settings, unless unavoidable. Please contact us immediately at nursery if you suspect your child has measles. Use the Healthier Together app to judge if your child needs to see a GP or A&E. If they don't then call the GP who can refer your child for testing over the phone. If they do, then call ahead to the GP or A&E explain the situation to the reception – that helps us isolate at risk individuals and keep everyone safe.