

Measles information for parents and carers

Officials from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) recently reported a concerning increase in measles cases across the UK.

Here, we explain everything you need to know about the rise in measles cases, from getting your child vaccinated to when to keep them off school.

Measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) are more than just childhood illnesses. They are highly infectious diseases that can have severe consequences, particularly for babies and young children. Some of the more serious complications from measles are highlighted on the NHS website (www.nhs.uk/measles) and include:

- pneumonia
- meningitis
- blindness
- seizures (fits)

These problems are rare, but some people are more at risk. This includes babies and people with weakened immune systems.

Fortunately, we have the power to prevent these diseases through the MMR vaccine and maintaining high vaccine uptake is crucial to protect individuals and communities from outbreaks.

There is a declining trend in measles vaccination rates among children in recent years. Measles is so infectious that even a small decline in uptake can result in outbreaks – so it's vital for us to maintain a target of two doses to prevent such outbreaks.

There is no evidence of any link between the MMR vaccine and autism. There are many studies that have investigated this.

[The Oxford University Vaccine Knowledge Project website has a list of MMR studies and their findings](#)

Why have vaccination rates fallen in recent years?

Reported cases of measles decreased in 2020, likely as a result of the social distancing and lockdown measures introduced to prevent COVID-19. As a result of fewer cases, it may be that measles hasn't been viewed as a continuing threat, so vaccination may have been seen as less important. Some children missed out on their routine vaccines during the pandemic for a variety of reasons and still need to catch up on their vital doses. Vaccine hesitancy may also be a contributing factor, whilst pressure on primary care and a reduction in health visitors are also likely to be leading to lower uptake.

Symptoms of measles

Measles usually starts with cold-like symptoms, followed by a rash a few days later. Some people may also get small spots in their mouth. You can find out more about measles symptoms on the NHS website.

If you think your child has measles

You should ask for an urgent GP appointment or get help from NHS 111.

Do not go to the GP or any other healthcare setting without calling ahead first if you think your child has measles.

They should also avoid close contact with babies and anyone who is pregnant or has a weakened immune system. If you get measles when you're pregnant, it could harm the baby.

It can cause:

- miscarriage or stillbirth
- premature birth (before the 37th week of pregnancy)
- your baby having a low birthweight

It's important to get medical advice if you're pregnant and have been in close contact with someone who has measles.

The best way to protect against measles

The best protection against measles for children and adults is to get both doses of the MMR vaccine.

You can request a version of the MMR vaccine that does not contain pork products from your GP, making it suitable for all faiths. Please note, the practice may need to order this product in specially, so it will be helpful to tell them your views before the appointment.

Children are offered a vaccine free on the NHS at 12-months-old and then a second dose when they turn 3-years-and-4-months-old.

But you can catch up at any age – if you or your child haven't yet been vaccinated, you should contact your GP practice to book a free appointment.

Cold-like symptoms can be an early sign of measles. Should you still send your child to school?

If your child has been vaccinated, it's very unlikely that they have measles.

School attendance is vitally important to your child's learning and health.

According to the NHS, it's fine to send your child to school with a minor cough or common cold, as long as they don't have a temperature.

When you should keep your child off school or nursery and how long for

If your child has measles, they should stay off nursery or school for at least 4 days from when the rash first appears and avoid close contact with babies and anyone who is pregnant or has a weakened immune system.

The school or Kirklees Council's Health Protection Team will let you know if your child has been in contact with someone who has measles, and will tell you what you need to do.

The Health Protection Team may advise people who are more susceptible to contracting the virus, such as unvaccinated siblings to stay off school/nursery for the incubation period of 21 days. This is the length of time it can take to develop the illness after being in contact with someone with measles.

Anyone who has been fully vaccinated is more unlikely to spread measles.

If you're not sure whether your child is due a vaccination or has missed a vaccination, you can check your Red Book or contact your GP practice.

Should you keep your child off school if another pupil has been diagnosed with measles?

Most children will be protected against measles and there is no need to keep your child off school if they have had both their MMR vaccinations.

You will be informed if your child has been in contact with someone with measles and will let you know what the next steps are.

Can older children and adults get the MMR vaccination?

Yes. Anyone who has not had 2 doses of the MMR vaccine should ask their GP surgery for a vaccination appointment.

It's best to have vaccines on time, but you can still catch up on most vaccines if you miss them. Two doses of the vaccine are needed to ensure full protection.

For more information about measles and MMR go to: [**www.nhs.uk/measles**](http://www.nhs.uk/measles).