



We commit ourselves to love, respect and serve one another as disciples of Jesus Christ'

Dear parents,

On 1st February 2022 the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) supported by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and the NHS to launch a new campaign encouraging parents and guardians of children to check that their children's MMR vaccines are up to date and encourage those that may have missed their appointments to come forward.

Coverage for the two doses of the MMR vaccine in 5-year-old children in England is well below the 95% WHO target needed to achieve and sustain measles elimination.

The MMR Vaccination

The MMR vaccine protects against three infections: measles, mumps and rubella. These are viral infections that can quickly spread to non-immune children and adults who have not had their vaccinations or been previously infected. All children are invited for their first MMR dose at 1 year and for the second MMR dose at around age 3 years and 4 months but it is never too late to have the MMR vaccination; adults can also be vaccinated if they haven't already.

With **around 1 in 10 children** unvaccinated and unprotected against MMR, and because measles is so infectious, even small drops in MMR coverage can have a big impact on population immunity and mean leaves us vulnerable to importations and outbreaks.

Measles

Measles is highly infectious and can lead to serious complications and, on rare occasions, it can be fatal. Because measles is so infectious, very high coverage (over 95%) with two doses of the Measles Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine is necessary to eliminate it. Measles continues to circulate in many countries around the world and there are currently several large outbreaks in countries across Europe where MMR vaccine uptake has been low. Until measles elimination is achieved globally we will continue to see imported cases of measles to the United Kingdom (UK). The good news is that all the evidence supports the fact that global measles eradication is feasible and cost-effective.

Measles can infect **around 9 out of 10** non-immune (those who are unvaccinated or have not previously been infected with the measles virus) people exposed to it and can lead to serious complications. Anyone who hasn't had two doses of the MMR vaccine and has not had measles in the past can catch it.

The MMR vaccine is the safest and most effective way for parents to protect their children against measles, mumps and rubella.

Mumps

In 2019 there were 5055 laboratory confirmed cases of mumps in England. This was the highest number of cases recorded since 2009. The steep rise in mumps cases in 2019 was largely driven by outbreaks in universities and colleges. Many of the cases were seen in the so-called 'Wakefield cohorts' – young adults born in the late nineties and early 2000s who missed out on the MMR vaccine when they were children. These cohorts are now old enough to attend college and university and are likely to continue fueling outbreaks. The closure of universities and schools on 23 March 2020 interrupted transmission of mumps outbreaks



linked to these settings and since then there have only been 224 laboratory confirmed mumps cases in England.

Rubella

The WHO confirmed that the UK had eliminated rubella in 2015. No laboratory confirmed cases of rubella have been reported since 2019.

What can I, as parent/guardian, do to keep myself and my children safe?

As the most effective method to eliminating measles, mumps and rubella, the MMR vaccination is given as part of the routine NHS childhood vaccination programme. As a result, parents and guardians are being encouraged to ensure their children are vaccinated against MMR, and if they can't remember if their child is up to date to check his or her Red Book (personal child health record) or contact your registered GP.

Below are simple actions you can take to support the eradication of measles, mumps and rubella in the UK.

1. Get vaccinated.

- a. Routine vaccinations are offered for free on the NHS to all babies and children and millions of doses have been given safely in the UK and around the world. All vaccines are thoroughly tested for safety and are continually monitored after they are introduced.
- b. Parents or guardians of children who are not up to date with their two doses of MMR vaccine should contact their GP practice to book an appointment. It's never too late to catch up. **Find out more at [nhs.uk/MMR](https://www.nhs.uk/MMR)**
- c. If you are unsure of your or your child's vaccination status consult the red book or speak to your GP.

2. Be aware of the signs and symptoms

- a. Knowledge of the signs and symptoms of measles, mumps and rubella can support eradication of the virus's.
- b. Stay off nursery, school or work for at least 4 days if you have a rash which could be measles and avoid contact with babies, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems.
- c. Ask for an urgent GP appointment or get help from 111 if you think your child has measles. Medical advice should also be sought if you have been in close contact with someone who has measles and you are pregnant, have a weakened immune system or have not had 2 doses of the MMR vaccination. As measles can spread easily to others, **call your GP surgery before you go in**. They may suggest a telephone consultation to keep others safe from possible transmission.
- d. **CALL 999** if you or your child has measles and shortness of breath, a high temperature which does not come down, confusion or seizures. **Do NOT attend A&E without calling first if measles is suspected or medically confirmed.**

3. Take precautions if travelling abroad

- a. In 2022, 37 countries experienced large or disruptive measles outbreaks. Of the countries experiencing outbreaks, 28 were in Africa, six in the Eastern Mediterranean, two in the South-East Asia, and one in the European Region. 2023 has shown a high number of measles outbreaks and cases in Yemen, India, Romania, Pakistan and Nigeria amongst other countries.