

MMR vaccine catch-up to tackle threat of measles

A vaccination campaign aimed at curbing the growing threat of measles has been announced by the Public Health Agency (PHA).

From today first and second doses of the Mumps, Measles and Rubella (MMR) vaccine will be offered to anyone aged between 12 months and 25 years who missed getting the vaccines first time around. The MMR catch-up campaign will run until 31 March 2024. Those who have never received any doses of MMR vaccine should book early to allow one month between dose one and dose two before the end of March.

After a worrying drop in uptake in recent years and a growing number of measles cases in the UK and Europe, the PHA is urging parents to get their children vaccinated.

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4 minutes



MMR catch-up

Anyone aged between **12 months** and **25 years** of age who missed their scheduled MMR doses can receive their **first** and **second** dose of **MMR** vaccine at a catch-up clinic.


Measles Mumps Rubella



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After a worrying drop in uptake in recent years and a growing number of measles cases in the UK and Europe, the PHA is urging parents to get their children vaccinated.

Louise Flanagan, Consultant in Public Health at the PHA, said: “As a whole the childhood vaccination programme has been a success, with Northern Ireland traditionally having uptake rates above the UK average, which is why we have seen very few cases of illnesses such as measles compared with the rest of the UK. However, some vaccines have seen a decline in uptake in recent years, which risks a return of some of the diseases that they offer protection against.

“The diseases that these vaccines protect against can be life-changing and even deadly. No parent wants this for their child especially when these diseases are easily preventable. The vaccine is proven to be safe and has been used since the early 1980s. Please don’t put the MMR vaccine off, check now that your children are fully up to date with their MMR. Check your child’s red book and get in touch with your GP practice if you are not sure.”

Latest figures from the PHA show that in Northern Ireland 88.8% had received their first dose of MMR at two years of age and 85.4% had received their second dose of MMR when reported at five years of age. This means that Northern Ireland falls below the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation that at least 95% of children should be fully vaccinated for diseases, in order to prevent outbreaks.

England has seen an increase in measles cases and the WHO has reported a 30-fold rise of measles cases in Europe. Measles is highly infectious and can easily spread between unvaccinated people. Two doses of the MMR vaccine provide the best protection against measles, mumps and rubella.

In Northern Ireland, MMR vaccination is free with the first dose being offered when a child is one year old and the second when they are 3 years and 4 months old. Receiving both doses provides long-lasting protection.

Any children or young adults up to the age of 25 who missed getting the vaccines first time around will have the opportunity to receive it now. Children between 12 months and 5 years of age can get the vaccine through their GP practice and those aged 6 years to 25 years of age can attend an HSC Trust vaccination clinic. Information on trust clinics can be found at www.nidirect.gov.uk/mmr

Louise Flanagan continued: “It is particularly worrying that today’s statistics show that only 85.4% of children have received their second MMR vaccine dose by age five – well below the 95% level recommended by the WHO. We need to improve the uptake rates of both doses in order to provide protection to the population of Northern Ireland.

“Measles is one of the world’s most contagious diseases and cases are currently on the rise in the UK and Europe. We must ensure that vaccination rates improve to stop the spread of measles and give our communities the best possible protection available against this serious illness.

“It is vital that routine childhood vaccinations are up to date as this remains one of our best defences for public health. We urge parents and carers to check that their children are up to date on their vaccines and if not they should book an appointment to catch-up as soon as possible.”

If you're an adult up to the age of 25 and are unsure if you are fully-vaccinated, contact your GP surgery to check.

Find out more at www.nidirect.gov.uk/mmr

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