

Measles Outbreak (August 2012)



Over the summer, there has been an increase in the number of measles cases reported among members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities. Children and adults who are catching measles are those who haven't had both MMR jabs or haven't had measles before.

What is measles?

Measles is an infection that can spread very easily from person to person. It can make people very ill. Babies under one year old, teenagers and older people can get particularly sick with complications of measles. One in every 10 children who get measles ends up in hospital. Measles had become less common in the UK. However, the number of cases has risen in the past 10 years, and a number of Gypsy and Traveller children have had to be admitted to hospital with the illness over recent years. In rare cases, people (including Travellers) have died from measles.



How can I catch measles?

Measles is spread by coughing and sneezing. You can catch measles when someone who has measles coughs or sneezes near you. It is very infectious, and one case of measles can infect more than 15 other people if those people haven't been vaccinated or had measles before.

What are the signs and symptoms of measles?

It takes about a week to 10 days to become unwell after having contact with someone

with measles. At the beginning, someone with measles can feel like they have a bad cold, they get a fever and can have a dry cough. They may have red eyes or eyes which are sensitive to light. A few days later, a red-brown spotty rash appears which usually starts behind the ears, then spreads around the head and neck before spreading over the rest of the body. The rash lasts up to 8 days.



What should I do if I think I or someone in my family has measles?

If you think you or someone in your family may have measles then telephone your doctor. If you need to go straight to a doctor or hospital then tell the receptionist when you arrive that you think it is measles so they can give you a private room to wait in away from other people who might be at risk of catching measles.

Should I stay away from others if I have measles?

Yes, you are infectious with measles (and can spread it to other people) from the day before you get cold symptoms up until 4 full days after the measles rash comes. So, you should stay away from other people (especially children and pregnant women) as much as possible for at least 4 days after the rash has appeared. If your child has measles, and is in school, he/she should not return to school until at least four days after the appearance of the rash.

How can I protect myself and my family?

The best and safest way to prevent measles and to protect you, your family and friends from measles is the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine (jab). As well as protecting you against measles, two MMR vaccines will protect you against mumps and rubella (also called German measles) infections. The vaccine is free and can be given to children (over 6 months of age) and adults.

In the UK, the first MMR jab is given when a child is 12-13 months old, and a “booster” jab is given before the child starts school, usually between 3 years 4 months and 5 years of age. It’s never too late for your children (or yourself) to “catch up” with their jabs if they are behind and have missed some. If you are travelling, you can have the two jabs at different surgeries. If necessary, the two jabs can be given just a month apart to protect you as quickly as possible.

If your child is less than a year old, and there is measles on your site, the MMR vaccine can sometimes be given a bit before your child’s first Birthday.



Women who want to have a baby should make sure they have had 2 MMR vaccines before getting pregnant, as measles is dangerous in pregnancy and the MMR jab cannot be given to pregnant women. If you catch measles during pregnancy, it can be passed on to your

baby, and harm you and your baby. Measles in pregnancy can cause miscarriage, your baby to be born early (premature), or your baby to be born with a low birthweight.

Is the MMR jab safe?

Yes, the MMR jab is safe. There was a lot of publicity about a report in 1998 saying that the MMR jab was not safe and may cause autism. However, the research in this report was found to be false, and many other studies that were done since have found no link between the MMR jab and autism.

How do I get a MMR vaccine?

If you haven’t had two MMR jabs and aren’t registered with a GP (or you are travelling at the moment) click this web-link to find the nearest doctor’s surgery who will give you and your family the jabs:

www.nhs.uk/servicedirectories/pages/servicesearch.aspx

Phone to tell them you are a Traveller and need to be seen as a temporary patient. You will then get an appointment to have the free MMR jabs. Sometimes it might be possible for a nurse to come out to your site and give the jabs on site to everyone who needs them, if you are travelling with a large group or you think someone on the site has measles.

You can find out more about measles at: www.nhs.uk/conditions/measles/Pages/Introduction.aspx, or you can call NHS Direct for information on Tel: 0845 4647.

