



Press Statement

17 January 2018

Solihull measles cases prompt MMR vaccination call

Solihull residents are being encouraged to check that they, their children and teenagers have had two doses of MMR vaccine following confirmation of seven cases of measles in the borough. The cases are linked to 32 other cases in Birmingham and are part of a national outbreak affecting five areas in England.*

Public Health England (PHE) West Midlands is working with Solihull Council and local NHS partners to make sure that anyone who needs an MMR vaccination is aware. Most of the recent cases had not received the required two doses of MMR vaccine.

Consultant in Health Protection with Public Health England (PHE) West Midlands, Dr Bharat Sibal, said: "Those affected in Solihull are all recovering but it's important to be aware that measles can be a very serious illness and lead to severe complications, especially in people who are particularly vulnerable or have other health conditions.

"Measles is a highly infectious viral illness. If you think you could have measles, it is really important to stay away from areas where you could come into contact with lots of other people – especially vulnerable patients in hospitals, care homes or other settings.

"I would urge anyone with symptoms to stay at home and phone their GP or NHS 111 for advice, rather than visiting the surgery or A&E, to prevent the illness spreading further. It is possible for anyone at any age to get measles and the illness can be more severe in teenagers and adults than in young children."

Public Health England (PHE) has reported an increase in measles across the country over the year.

Dr Sibal added: "The free MMR vaccine is a safe and effective way of protecting against measles, as well as mumps and rubella. It's particularly important for parents to take up the offer of MMR vaccination for their children when offered at one year of age and as a pre-school booster at three years, four months of age. If children and young adults have missed these vaccinations in the past, it's important to take up the vaccine now from GPs, particularly in light of the recent cases in Solihull. Check your

child's Red Book to see if they've received MMR vaccinations as scheduled, or check with your GP surgery if you're unsure."

Measles symptoms to be aware of include:

- high fever
- sore, red, watery eyes
- coughing
- aching and feeling generally unwell
- a blotchy red brown rash, which usually appears after the initial symptoms.

Ends

* West Midlands, Merseyside and Cheshire, Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, Surrey.

For more information contact PHE West Midlands press office on 0121 232 9223/4 Out Of Hours 07834 311 393

Notes to Editors

1. Public Health England exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. It does this through world-class science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and the delivery of specialist public health services. PHE is an operationally autonomous executive agency of the Department of Health.

Website: www.gov.uk/phe Facebook: www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland
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2. About measles:

What is measles?

Measles is a viral infection most commonly found in young children who have not been immunised. However, adults can also catch measles if they have not had it before or have not been immunised against it.

It begins with fever that lasts for a couple of days followed by a cough, runny nose and conjunctivitis (red, sore eyes). The rash starts on the face and upper neck, spreads down the upper body and then extends to the arms, hands, legs and feet. After about 5 days the rash starts to fade.

How serious is measles?

Measles is an unpleasant illness and easily passed from one person to another. In some people it can cause complications, such as ear infection, chest infections and even pneumonia. In very rare cases some people who get measles can develop serious complications, which can be fatal.

How do you catch measles?

The measles virus lives in the nose and throat of infected people. Measles is caught through direct contact with an infected person or through the air when he or she coughs or sneezes. **A person with measles can infect other people from the day before they become unwell until 5 days after the rash appears.**

How is measles treated?

There is no specific treatment for measles, but measles can be prevented by a highly effective vaccine. This is part of the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) immunisation programme, with a first dose at 12-15 months and a second dose at 3-5 years.

A scientific paper authored by Andrew Wakefield and 12 others, which appeared in the medical journal The Lancet in 1998 and implied a link between the MMR vaccine and autism, was disproved and retracted by the journal in 2010.

What to do to avoid passing on the infection:

Limit your contacts with other people, particularly those who are:

- pregnant
- children who are under 12 months or have not had the MMR vaccine
- people who have weak immune systems
- if you have measles, do not go to school or work for 5 days from when the rash first appeared and inform your school or employer immediately

Who is at risk from complications?

Anyone can be susceptible to complications from measles; however complications resulting from measles are more likely to develop in some children, for example:

- children with a weakened immune system, such as those with leukaemia or HIV/AIDS
- children with a poor diet
- children under the age of 5 years

Complications are also more likely to develop in adults who are over the age of 20

Complications of measles include:

- pneumonia
- ear and eye infections
- croup (an infection of the lungs and throat)

What if you're pregnant or planning to get pregnant?

If you are planning to get pregnant and you have not had measles yet, you should arrange with your GP to have the MMR vaccine. If you catch measles during pregnancy, it can be passed on to your baby and can be very damaging, or even fatal. Measles in pregnancy can cause miscarriage, premature labour or a baby with low birth weight. The MMR jab cannot be given during pregnancy.