Measles

What is measles?

Measles is a serious illness. It usually starts with cold–like symptoms then a rash. 1 in 5 children who catch measles need a hospital visit.

There is also the risk of very serious complications if it spreads to the lungs and brain.

The MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) vaccine is offered to young children to help protect against illness and to stop the spread of measles.

Who should get the MMR vaccine?

Measles is very infectious. In the UK, we aim for 95% of people to have the MMR vaccine. This stops the diseases spreading in our communities and protects those who can't have the vaccine (e.g. babies under 12 months).

Young children will be offered their first dose at 12 months and second dose at 3 years and 4 months, but adults can also have the vaccine if they weren't vaccinated as a child.

Does the vaccine have side effects?

There can sometimes be mild side effects to the vaccine, like a rash or fever, but these only last a few days. More severe side effects are very rare and are monitored constantly.

The chance of complications from catching measles is a lot higher than any side effects you might experience from the vaccine.

If you aren't sure if you've had the vaccine, get in touch with your GP.

Is there a link between the MMR vaccine and autism?

No. There has been lots of research and there is overwhelming evidence that there is no link.

Why does my child need two doses of the MMR vaccine?

The first dose is to protect your child, and the second dose tops up that protection and helps to stop them spreading it.

I'm worried about my child's immune system being overloaded.

Children's immune systems are exposed to lots of things in their everyday environment. The vaccinations they receive are only a small fraction of this and they help to protect against the most serious illnesses.

Find out more

- BSI Guide to Childhood Vaccinations
- Talk to your GP or health visitor
- Look on the NHS websites
- Always use trusted sources