

MMR FACT SHEET

The MMR vaccine: - MMR is the combined vaccine that protects against measles, mumps and rubella (German measles)

Measles, mumps and rubella are highly infectious, common conditions that can have serious, potentially fatal, complications, including meningitis, swelling of the brain (encephalitis) and deafness. They can also lead to complications in pregnancy that affect the unborn baby and can lead to miscarriage.

Since the MMR vaccine was introduced in 1988, it's rare for children in the UK to develop these serious conditions. However, outbreaks happen and cases of measles in particular have been rising in recent years, so it's important to make sure your children are up-to-date with their MMR vaccination.

MMR vaccine for babies

The first MMR vaccine is given on the NHS as a single injection to babies as part of their routine vaccination schedule, usually within a month of their first birthday. They will then have a second injection of the vaccine before starting school, usually between the ages of three and five.

The MMR vaccine can sometimes be given earlier than their first birthday if you think that your baby has been exposed to the measles virus, say as a result of a measles outbreak.

The vaccine is given as a single injection into the muscle of the thigh or upper arm.

MMR for older children

Children of any age up to 18 who missed, or only partially completed, their earlier MMR vaccination, can have a 'catch-up' vaccination on the NHS.

If you know, or suspect, your child hasn't been fully immunised, arrange with your GP for them to have a catch-up MMR vaccination,

MMR for adults

The MMR vaccine can also be given on the NHS to certain adults who may need it including:

- women planning pregnancy
- people born between 1970 and 1979 and between 1980 and 1990

If you are a woman thinking about getting pregnant you may need to be vaccinated if you have low levels of rubella antibodies or you haven't had a rubella or MMR vaccination before.

People born between 1970 and 1979 who may have only been vaccinated against measles also need the MMR vaccine, as well as those born between 1980 and 1990 who may not be protected against mumps.

Check with your GP if you're not sure whether you've had rubella or MMR. If in doubt, go ahead and have the MMR vaccination, it won't harm you to have a second vaccination.

How the MMR vaccine works

The MMR vaccine contains weakened versions of live measles, mumps and rubella viruses.

The vaccine works by triggering the immune system (the body's natural defence against infection and illness) to produce antibodies against measles, mumps and rubella.

If you or your child then comes into contact with one of the diseases, the immune system will recognise it and immediately produce the antibodies needed to fight it.

It's not possible for people who have recently had the vaccine to infect other people.

The MMR vaccine given in the UK is known under the brand names Priorix or MMR VaxPRO.

Does the MMR vaccine cause autism?

There has been some controversy about whether the MMR vaccine might cause autism, following a study published in 1998 by Dr Andrew Wakefield. In his paper published in The Lancet, Dr Wakefield claimed a link between the MMR vaccine and autism or bowel disease.

However, Andrew Wakefield's work has since been completely discredited. Subsequent studies during the last eight years have found no link between the MMR vaccine and autism or bowel disease.

Single measles, mumps and rubella vaccines

Single vaccines are not routinely given in the UK. They're not available on the NHS as there is a risk that fewer children would receive all the necessary injections, increasing the levels of measles, mumps and rubella in the UK.

The delay in having six separate injections would also put more children at risk of developing the conditions, as well as increasing the amount of work and inconvenience for parents and those administering the vaccines.

Side effects of MMR vaccine

As there are three separate vaccines within a single injection, different side effects can occur at different times. The side effects of the MMR vaccine are usually mild. It's important to remember that they're milder than the potential complications of measles, mumps and rubella.

Side effects include:

- developing a mild form of measles that lasts for two to three days
- developing a mild form of mumps that lasts for a day or two

In rare cases, a small rash of bruise-like spots may appear a number of weeks after the injection. See your GP if you notice this kind of rash, or if you have any concerns about your child's symptoms following the MMR.