



# Measles

## General information for staff working in prisons in England

Due to the current number of cases of measles reported in the community this information sheet has been developed for people working in prisons.

### 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).
- After a few days a red-brown spotty rash will appear. This starts on the face and upper neck, spreading 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 the start of initial symptoms of fever, cough, runny nose and sore eyes until four days after the rash appears.

### Can you prevent measles?

- Yes. Measles can be prevented by a highly effective vaccine. This is part of the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) childhood immunisation programme with a first dose at 12 months and a second dose at 3 years 4 months.

## Why am I being asked to consider the measles vaccine?

In recent times, we have seen a significant rise in the number of measles cases generally, including outbreaks in some communities and settings, such as schools and nurseries. We have also had one outbreak to date in a prison earlier this year. Thankfully, the outbreak was contained quickly but there remains a significant risk of measles outbreaks affecting prisons because a) measles is highly infectious; b) there may be many prisoners and staff who are vulnerable to infection, and c) even a single infectious person could result in many more cases. Therefore, to protect the health and well-being of both staff and prisoners and to avoid disruptions to the prison regime and operation, we are recommending that staff are checked to see if they are potentially vulnerable to infection and then offered MMR if appropriate.

## Can you tell if you're protected against measles?

- People who have had measles in the past cannot get it again.
- People born before 1970 are likely to have been exposed to measles as a child and have natural immunity.
- People born after 1970 are less likely to have natural immunity and unless they have had two doses of MMR (or another vaccine containing measles) they may be at risk of getting measles.
- People who have had two doses of MMR are very unlikely to get measles.
- It is quite safe to have extra doses of MMR, so if there is any doubt, it is better to have an extra dose than to risk not being fully protected.

## What if you are pregnant?

- MMR should not be given to pregnant women so pregnant women who are in contact with cases of measles should seek advice from their doctor.

## What if you have a weak immune system?

- People with weak immune systems can become seriously ill if they catch measles. These people should seek medical advice from their GP if they suspect they have come into contact with a case of measles.

## Do I need to get the vaccine?

**Yes** if:

- You were born after 1970 and do not have documented evidence of two previous doses of a measles-containing vaccination or have not previously had measles (however although the risk of developing measles is smaller in those born before 1970, vaccination for this age group is still available on request if you have not previously been vaccinated).

## Where do I get the vaccine?

Your local GP practice should be able to provide you with the vaccine.

## Where can I get more information about measles and the MMR vaccine?

- More information about measles is available at:  
[www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics\\_az/measles/background.htm](http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/measles/background.htm)
- Or from the NHS Choices website at: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/Measles/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Measles/Pages/Introduction.aspx)

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