



Public Health  
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

# Measles outbreaks across Europe and the start of the summer festival season

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# Measles outbreaks across Europe and the start of the summer festival season

There are currently several large measles outbreaks across Europe, with Romania and Italy being the worst affected countries. The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe has warned that this threatens progress towards elimination and urged national authorities to maximize efforts to achieve and/or sustain at least 95% coverage with two doses of measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine to prevent circulation in the event of an importation [1]. In response, the National Travel Health Network and Centre (NaTHNaC) issued a reminder to travellers to ensure they are up to date with their MMR vaccination [2]. All WHO Regions have set targets for measles elimination by 2020 and although much progress has been made globally measles remains endemic in many countries [3].

## **Epidemiological situation in England, as at end-May 2017**

Between 1 July 2016 and 31 May 2017, in England, there were 27 confirmed measles importations, with limited onward transmission mainly among unimmunised or under-immunised household contacts (at least eight cases). Fourteen of the England importations were linked to travel within Europe, with Romania contributing the largest number of cases (eight of the 14 cases). Further importations to England are expected over the summer period with increasing travel to and from Europe and the rest of the world.

PHE has previously reported 52 confirmed measles cases linked to music and arts festivals in England and Wales in 2016 [4]. Nearly half of these cases were among 15-19 year-olds. Several individuals who acquired measles at one festival subsequently attended another festival while infectious, resulting in multiple, interlinked outbreaks. Transmission within festivals resulted in a geographical spread of cases nationally as well as internationally.

PHE has reminded its Health Protection Teams to note the above when undertaking risk assessments of suspected cases during the summer months; also that, in order to monitor importations and chains of transmission, it is essential that every suspected case, including those confirmed locally, is tested with an oral fluid test, as per the *National measles guidelines* [5]. In addition HPTs are reminded to follow the *Measles guidance on international travel and travel by air* [6].

## References

1. WHO Regional Office for Europe (2017). [Measles outbreaks across Europe threaten progress towards elimination](#) (press release, 27 March).
2. Nathan website (2017). [Measles in Europe: a reminder for travellers to be up to date with measles vaccine](#) (news story, 26 April).
3. World Health Organization (2012). [Global measles and rubella strategic plan: 2012-2020](#).
4. le Polain de Waroux O, Saliba V, Cottrell S, Young N, Perry M, Bukasa A, Ramsay M, *et al* (2016). [Summer music and arts festivals as hot spots for measles transmission: experience from England and Wales, June to October 2016](#). *Euro Surveill* **21**(44).
5. PHE website. [National measles guidelines](#).
6. PHE website. [Measles: public health response to cases who have travelled by air whilst infectious](#).

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## About Health Protection Report

*Health Protection Report* is a national public health bulletin for England and Wales, published by Public Health England. It is PHE's principal channel for the dissemination of laboratory data relating to pathogens and infections/communicable diseases of public health significance and of reports on outbreaks, incidents and ongoing investigations.

Public Health England, Wellington House, 133-155 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8UG

Tel: 020 7654 8000 [www.gov.uk/phe](http://www.gov.uk/phe)

Twitter: [@PHE\\_uk](https://twitter.com/PHE_uk) Facebook: [www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland](https://www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland)

Queries relating to this document should be directed to:

HIV and STI Department,  
National Infection Service, PHE Colindale,  
61 Colindale Avenue, London NW9 5EQ.

[gumcad@phe.gov.uk](mailto:gumcad@phe.gov.uk)

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