



News Release

Local MMR vaccination plans to be developed in response to increase in measles cases

A national catch-up programme to increase MMR vaccination uptake in children and teenagers is announced today (Thursday) by Public Health England, NHS England and the Department of Health. The aim of the programme is to prevent measles outbreaks by vaccinating as many unvaccinated and partially vaccinated 10-16 year olds as possible in time for the next school year.

New figures published today by Public Health England (PHE) show high numbers of confirmed measles cases in England in the first three months of 2013, reaching 587 by end of March, following a record annual high of almost 2,000 cases in 2012. Cases are distributed across England, with the highest totals in the North West and North East where there have been outbreaks of the disease.

Although there were only 34 confirmed cases in the last quarter in Cheshire & Merseyside the longer term trend nationally is one of increasing cases. In 2012 the area experienced a large outbreak of measles with 581 confirmed cases in 2012. (*See notes in editors for breakdown by local authority*). The majority of cases in the Cheshire & Merseyside outbreak were in the age group 0-5 year olds.

Experts believe that the current rise in measles cases can be mostly attributed to the proportion of unprotected 10-16 year olds, who missed out on vaccination in the late 1990s and early 2000s when concern around the discredited link between autism and the vaccine was widespread. After many years of low vaccination uptake, measles became re-established in 2007.

The catch-up programme announced today sets out a national framework within which local teams in Cheshire & Merseyside, (made up of NHS Merseyside and NHS Cheshire, Warrington and Wirral, working alongside Directors of Public Health in Local Government and supported by Cheshire & Merseyside PHE Centre), will produce tailored local plans to identify and give MMR to un-vaccinated and partially vaccinated 10-16 year olds through GPs and/or school programmes.

Professor Qutub Syed, PHE Cheshire & Merseyside Centre Director, said: "Measles is a potentially fatal but entirely preventable disease so it is very disappointing we are still seeing measles in the Cheshire & Merseyside area. The catch-up programme set out today recommends an approach to specifically target those young people most at risk. Those who have not been vaccinated should urgently seek at least one dose of MMR vaccination which will give them 95 per cent protection against measles. A second dose is then needed to provide almost complete protection."

Dr Paula Grey, Chair of the Cheshire & Merseyside Directors of Public Health said: “The only way to prevent measles outbreaks is to ensure good uptake of the MMR across all age groups, and that when cases are reported, immediate public health action is taken to protect vulnerable individuals as soon as possible. Measles is not a mild illness - it is very unpleasant and can lead to serious complications as we have seen with more than 100 children in England being hospitalised so far this year.

“It is never too late to get vaccinated against measles. Parents of unvaccinated children, teenagers and young adults who have missed out on MMR should urgently arrange to be vaccinated by their GP. If you are unsure whether you or your child has had two doses of the vaccine, speak to your GP who will have a record.”

To support the national programme, a new Facebook page has been launched (www.facebook.com/getvaccinatedEngland) in conjunction with NHS Choices.

Notes to editors

Table 1: Confirmed cases of measles by month, quarter and year with a comparison to the previous years by Local Authority for Cheshire and Merseyside

No – Confirmed cases Rate - Crude Rate per 100,000	Month		Quarter		Year					
	Latest Month – March	Previous month – February	Latest quarter Jan – March 2013	Previous quarter Oct – Dec 2012	Year to date (up to March)		Previous year (up to March 2012)		Previous year (Total 2012)	
					No	Rate	No	Rate	No	Rate
PHE Centre	2	4	34	102	34	1.73	145	7.39	581	29.6
Cheshire East	0	0	1	6	1	0.27	1	0.27	15	4.05
Cheshire West and Chester	0	0	1	17	1	0.30	11	3.34	37	11.2
Halton	0	0	1	3	1	0.80	1	0.80	9	7.16
Knowsley	0	0	0	14	0	0	22	15.1	99	67.9
Liverpool	0	2	7	38	7	1.50	83	17.8	307	65.9
Sefton	0	2	19	20	19	6.94	20	7.30	71	25.9
St. Helens	1	0	2	1	2	1.14	3	1.71	19	10.8
Warrington	1	0	3	3	3	1.48	1	0.49	6	2.96
Wirral	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.94	18	5.63

1. More information on the MMR catch-up programme will be available on the PHE website from Thursday 25 April: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england/series/MMR-catch-up-programme-2013>. A table with laboratory confirmed cases of measles by region and age group in England is available from the press office under embargo.
2. For more information on measles and MMR, please visit: <http://www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/Measles/measles/MMR> or <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Measles/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
3. Public Health England is a new executive agency of the Department of Health that took up its full responsibilities on 1 April, 2013. PHE works with national and local government, industry and the NHS to protect and improve the nation's health and support healthier choices and will be addressing inequalities by focusing on removing barriers to good health. To find out more visit our website www.gov.uk/phe, follow us on Twitter @PHE_uk.

Issued by: Public Health England Press Office, 5th Floor, Rail House, Lord Nelson Street, Liverpool L1 1JF

Tel: 0844 225 1295 – option 2 (includes out of hours)

Email: northwest-pressoffice@phe.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/phe