



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, cough, runny nose and red sore eyes that lasts for 2 to 4 days
- 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 spread the infection in the 4 days before they get the rash. Once a person has the rash, they can still spread the infection for another 4 days

Can you prevent measles?

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

However it's never too late to have the MMR vaccine, if you haven't had it or are unsure then you can be vaccinated as an adult to protect you against measles.

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

In recent times we have seen a significant rise in measles cases in the community and outbreaks in many settings.

There is a significant risk of measles outbreaks in 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 are unlikely to 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 2 doses of MMR (or another vaccine containing measles) they may be at risk of getting measles
- people who have had 2 doses of MMR are very unlikely to get measles
- if there is any doubt, it is better to have an extra dose than to risk not being fully protected

What if I am pregnant?

- if you have had 2 doses of MMR you and your pregnancy are protected against measles, mumps and rubella
- measles and rubella can be very serious in pregnancy. Please avoid anyone who has measles. If you have another child with measles, please urgently inform health team
- you can't be given the MMR vaccine if you are pregnant; if you think you have been in contact with someone with measles, let the healthcare team know as soon as possible

What if you have a weak immune system?

- if you have a weak immune system you should seek medical advice from your GP if you suspect you have come into contact with someone with measles

Do I need to get the vaccine?

Yes if:

- you were born after 1970 and do not have documented evidence of 2 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.gov.uk/government/collections/measles-guidance-data-and-analysis
- or from NHS.UK website at: www.nhs.uk/conditions/measles