

## **Measles FAQs and advice for settings**

### **What is measles?**

[Measles](#) is a highly infectious viral infection. Symptoms include a runny nose; cough; conjunctivitis (sore, itchy, watery, red and sticky eyes); high fever and small white spots (Koplik spots) inside the cheeks. Around day 3 of the illness, a rash of flat red or brown blotches appear, beginning on the face, behind the ears and spreading over the body.

The incubation period (the period between exposure to an infection and the appearance of the first symptoms) is between 10 to 12 days but can vary from 7 to 21 days.

### **How is measles spread?**

Measles is transmitted via airborne, or droplet spread, or direct contact with nasal or throat secretions of infected people. Cases are infectious from 4 days before onset of rash to 4 days after, where the date of the rash onset is day 0.

### **How infectious is measles?**

Measles is one of the most contagious diseases. Measles is so contagious that if one person has it, up to 90% of the people close to that person who are not immune (not vaccinated/has not had measles before) will also become infected.

Infected people can spread measles to others from four days before through four days after the rash appears. Measles virus can live for up to two hours in an airspace after an infected person leaves an area.

### **Who is at risk of measles?**

People in certain at-risk groups including babies and small children, pregnant women, and people with weakened immunity are at increased risk of complications if they catch measles. Complications can include chest and ear infections, fits, diarrhoea, encephalitis (infection of the brain) and brain damage. Those who develop complications may need to be admitted to hospital for treatment. Measles can, on occasion, cause permanent disability or death.

### **What is the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine?**

The best protection against measles is the MMR vaccine which is safe and effective. It's a combined vaccine which protects against three serious illnesses: Measles, mumps and rubella. The vaccine not only protects them, but also limits the chances of the virus spreading more widely, for example to children who are too young to have the vaccine and to adults who may be more vulnerable to the disease. Children should receive two doses of MMR for maximum protection.

### **How effective is the MMR vaccine?**

The MMR vaccine is very effective. After 2 doses:

- around 99% of people will be protected against measles and rubella
- around 88% of people will be protected against mumps

People who are vaccinated against mumps, but still catch it, are less likely to have serious complications or be admitted to hospital. Protection against measles, mumps and rubella starts to develop around 2 weeks after having the MMR vaccine.

### **When is the vaccination given?**

The MMR vaccine is given to babies and young children as part of the [NHS vaccination schedule](#). The vaccination is offered at:

- 1 year (MMR 1<sup>st</sup> dose)
- 3 years and 4 months (MMR 2<sup>nd</sup> dose)

### **Does the MMR vaccine contain porcine gelatine?**

Gelatine is used in a very wide range of medicines as a stabiliser. This is to ensure that the vaccine remains safe and effective during storage. Unlike the gelatine used in foods, the product used in vaccines is highly purified and broken down into very small molecules called peptides.

There is a version of the MMR vaccine which does not involve porcine gelatin in its production, for those concerned about its contents. Parents not wishing their children to have the porcine gelatine-containing MMR should request the Priorix® vaccine from their GP. A full course of 2 doses will provide protection against measles, mumps and rubella. Please note that the practice may need to order this product in specially.

### **Can I have the MMR vaccine if I'm pregnant?**

As a precaution, the MMR vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women. You should also avoid becoming pregnant for 1 month after having the MMR vaccine. It's best to let your GP or midwife know if you had the MMR vaccine while you were pregnant. Evidence suggests there will be no harm to your baby, but it's better to let them know.

### **Can I have the MMR vaccine if I have a weakened immune system?**

The MMR vaccine is not recommended for people with a severely weakened immune system. For example, people receiving [chemotherapy](#). If you have a medical condition or are taking medicine that may affect your immune system, check with your healthcare provider if it's safe for you to have the MMR vaccine.

### **What should I do if I haven't had the MMR vaccine?**

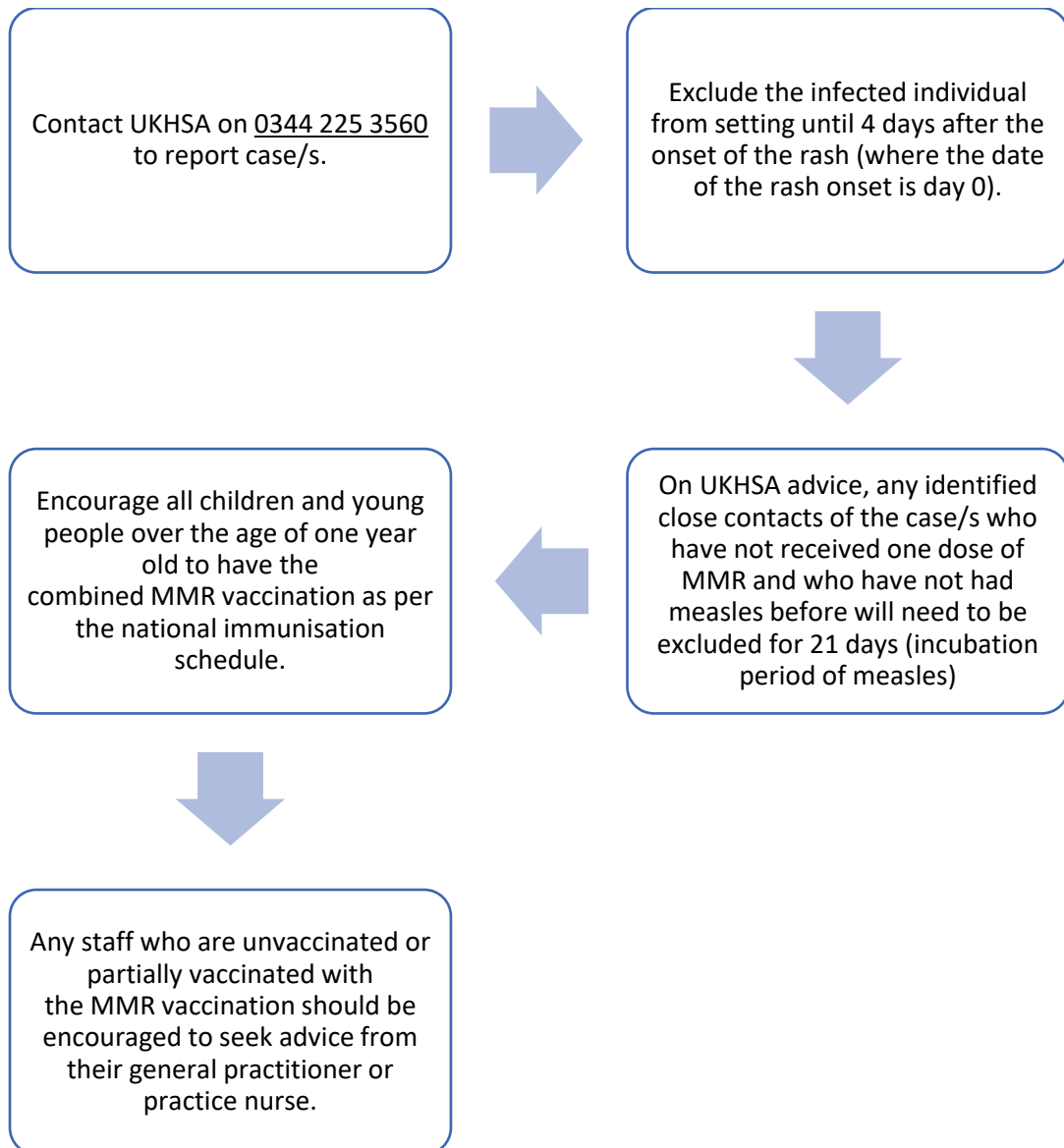
Anyone who has not had 2 doses of the MMR vaccine should ask their GP surgery for a vaccination appointment to make sure that they're protected. It's never too late to be vaccinated and the MMR is free on the NHS.

**What happens if you think you or your child may have measles?**

- If you think you or your child may have measles
- you've been in close contact with someone who has measles and you've not had measles before, or you've not had 2 doses of the MMR vaccine
- you've been in close contact with someone who has measles and you're pregnant – measles can be serious in pregnancy
- you have a weakened immune system and think you have measles or have been in close contact with someone with measles

As measles can spread to others easily, do not go to A&E or your GP. Instead call your GP on the telephone, call 111 or [get help from 111 online](#).

**Advice for settings with an incident/outbreak of measles (suspected or confirmed).**



**General advice:**

- Reinforce infection control advice (hand hygiene/cough etiquette/ increased environmental cleaning and touch point cleaning/ ventilation). (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities/preventing-and-controlling-infections>)
- Encouraging all people who are unwell not to attend the setting or remain separate from others, wherever possible – [further guidance on exclusion periods is available for specific infectious diseases](#)
- ensuring all eligible groups are enabled and supported to take up the offer of [immunisation programmes](#) including MMR.

- Request that parents, carers or students inform the setting of a diagnosis of any infectious disease.

### What to expect when contacting UKHSA

UKHSA will conduct a risk assessment of the situation based on the information provided. The risk assessment will then inform the need for any further actions.

They will ask you to share information to help them assess the size and nature of the outbreak or incident and advise on any recommended actions.

### Information will include:

the type of setting, for example nursery or special school	total numbers affected (children, young people and staff)	total numbers attending (children, young people and staff)
any food handlers affected	the number of classes, rooms, year groups affected (including nursery if applicable)	the symptoms experienced
the date when symptoms started, including a brief overview of the sequence of numbers of new cases since the outbreak started	any indications of severe disease such as overnight admissions to hospital	if there were any events or trips in the week prior to the start of the outbreak
if known, whether any tests or clinical assessments have taken place	vaccination uptake (for example for MMR and other infections)	if there are any individuals within the affected group at higher risk from severe disease

### UKHSA will advise on whether any actions are recommended, these may include:

- reinforcement of baseline infection prevention and control measures
- communication to parents, carers and students
- exceptionally, temporary advice to reduce mixing among a targeted group

- exceptionally, the temporary use of face coverings in communal areas

UKHSA may consider holding an incident management team (IMT) meeting, which would bring together local stakeholders and the appropriate local authority. If, in exceptional circumstances and as a last resort, limiting the number of people attending the setting is considered necessary for public health reasons, this should be discussed at an IMT meeting before being implemented. More advice is available via <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities/managing-outbreaks-and-incidents#when-to-contact-the-hpt>.