

Dear parent / guardian,

Ref: Measles is currently circulating in the West Midlands

There are especially high numbers of measles cases spreading across the West Midlands.

Unvaccinated children and adults are the most affected, with a significant proportion having to go to hospital.

Two doses of MMR vaccination via your GP offers the maximum protection for children and adults. And it's never too late to get the jabs if you've missed one or both.

Measles is likely to continue to spread rapidly unless more people are vaccinated urgently. Join the more than 9 out of every 10 Herefordshire residents who have protected themselves through vaccination so far.

To help contain the spread and protect yourself, family and community we ask you to:

- **Check your family's MMR vaccine status** and act urgently if anyone is missing one or both jabs
- Be aware of the **signs and symptoms of measles**
- If you suspect that you, or your child, could have measles it is important that you reduce the risk of passing it to others by **staying at home and calling your GP or NHS 111** for advice
- If you do need to visit your GP practice, walk-in centre or other healthcare setting, please **phone ahead** so arrangements can be made to reduce the spread.

Further details below.

Background

More than 9 out of every 10 people in Herefordshire have protected themselves from measles through vaccination. But that leaves around 1 in every 10 who are unprotected.

Pockets of low uptake of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine has led to cases, and outbreaks, across the country with the West Midlands being the worst affected area.

There have been many hundreds of cases of measles so far in the West Midlands. All ages have been affected, but the majority being children aged under 10 years.

Vaccination, with two doses of the MMR vaccine, gives people the maximum protection against measles. Those with no MMR jab are most at risk of both catching measles and becoming more ill because of it. This is unfortunately what we are seeing play out in reality.

What is measles?

Measles is a viral infection most commonly seen in young children who have not been immunised, but can also affect adults.

The measles virus is one of the most infectious viruses we know about so can spread rapidly among communities, for example within schools, if people are not vaccinated. One person can infect nine out of ten of their unvaccinated close contacts. Contacts of someone with measles, who are not fully immunised, may be excluded from attending work or school for up to 21 days.

Measles can cause complications if it spreads to other parts of the body such as pneumonia, meningitis (an infection of the lining of the brain) and blindness. These problems are rare but some people are more at risk, this includes babies and small children, pregnant women and people with weak immunity.

The MMR vaccine – check your status

The vaccine provides effective protection against three diseases – measles, mumps and rubella. It's effective, safe and free of charge. To be fully vaccinated you need to have two doses of the vaccine. Children would have been offered their first dose at 12-15 months and a second dose at 3-5 years as part of their routine NHS vaccinations in the UK.

Check your child's Red Book to see if they've received MMR vaccinations as scheduled, or check with your GP surgery if you're unsure.

Anyone who has not received two doses of the MMR vaccine should contact their GP practice to catch up, it's never too late.

If your family avoids pork, a MMR vaccine is available that does not contain any pork products. Contact your GP Practice to request this.

More information about the MMR vaccine can be found on the NHS website (www.nhs.uk search 'MMR').

Signs and symptoms of measles

Symptoms of measles appear 7-10 days after contact with the virus and include:

- Cold-like symptoms such as runny or blocked nose, sneezing and cough
- Red, sore, watery eyes
- High temperature (fever), which may reach around 40°C / 104°F
- A non-itchy, red-brown rash usually appears 3-5 days later (sometimes starts around the ears before spreading to rest of the body), spots may be raised and join to form blotchy patches – which may be harder to see on darker skin tones
- Small white spots may appear inside cheeks and the back of lips (for a few days)

If you suspect that you, or your child, could have measles it is important that you reduce the risk of passing it to others by staying at home. It's **important not to turn up at your GP practice, walk in centre or other healthcare setting**. Instead, you should contact your GP or NHS 111 for advice.

If you do need to visit your GP practice, walk-in centre or other healthcare setting, **please phone ahead so arrangements can be made to reduce the spread**.

More information about measles can be found on the [NHS website](#).

We thank you for your support in keeping yourselves and our community safe.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MP', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Matt Pearce
Director of Public Health