Mae Brechu yn achub bywydau
Vaccination saves lives

GIG CYMRU NHS WALES
Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru
Public Health Wales

Measles and the MMR/MMRV vaccination programme



Briefing document for schools, childcare settings, colleges and universities

This briefing document provides information on the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination programme, and the addition of chickenpox (varicella or 'V') vaccination to the routine vaccination schedule in Wales, as a combined MMRV vaccine.

Please ensure that all staff have access to this information.





Measles facts

1. Measles is a highly infectious virus that is spread when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes.
2. Measles is contagious before symptoms start. For every 100 people not vaccinated against measles, about 90 will catch measles if exposed to the virus.
3. It can cause serious illness including chest infections, seizures (fits), swelling of the brain, and brain damage. Serious complications can even occur many years after infection.
4. Measles can kill.
5. There is no cure for measles. Treatment involves relieving symptoms and preventing complications.
6. Two doses of a measles-containing vaccine provide the best possible protection.
7. Unvaccinated staff may be required to take up to three weeks off in the event of a measles outbreak.

Mae'r wybodaeth hon ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This information is available in Welsh.

Symptoms of measles

runny nose

red, sore, watery eyes

cough

fever (high temperature, 38°C or above)



a rash that starts on the face and behind the ears before spreading to the rest of the body. This usually appears a few days after cold-like symptoms (but not always)

rash looks brown or red on white skin. It may be harder to see on brown and black skin

small white spots on the insides of the cheeks and lips may develop

For more information about measles symptoms, visit **NHS 111 Wales - Health A-Z : Measles** (external site).

What to do if you suspect measles

If you suspect you or a colleague has measles, contact NHS **111** or make an urgent GP appointment. If you suspect a child/young person has measles, you should inform the parent/guardian as appropriate and ensure they contact NHS **111** or make an urgent GP appointment.

The person with suspected measles should not go to any health setting (e.g. GP surgery, hospital, or pharmacy) without phoning ahead first and advising of any symptoms which might suggest measles.

If a doctor suspects measles, the individual should not attend nursery, school, college or work until at least four days after the onset of rash. The date of the rash starting is day 0. They should also avoid being in contact with anybody who is:

- not fully vaccinated against measles
- pregnant
- immunosuppressed (has a weakened immune system) due to a health condition or treatment

What are the risks of being unvaccinated against measles?

As measles is a highly infectious disease, it spreads quickly between people who are not vaccinated.

Uptake of the MMR vaccine decreased in Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic. This means that we are now seeing an increase in cases of measles across the UK and in Wales.

Staff or children/young people who are unvaccinated and who have been in contact with a confirmed measles case will be advised to stay at home for the duration of the incubation period. The incubation period is the time frame it takes for a disease to develop after coming into contact with it. For measles, it is up to **21 days (three weeks) after last exposure to someone with measles**.

Mumps

Mumps is a viral infection that spreads easily. Mumps can lead to serious problems such as meningitis (an infection of the protective covering around the brain) and encephalitis (swelling of the brain). Very rarely, mumps can cause death.

Mumps is spread through infected droplets of saliva that can be inhaled or picked up from surfaces and transferred into the mouth or nose.

Some people with mumps do not show any symptoms, but they can still spread the disease to others. Common symptoms of mumps include painful swelling of two large glands on the side of the face, and a fever.

For more information about mumps symptoms, visit **NHS 111 Wales - Health A-Z : Mumps** (external site).

Rubella

Rubella (also known as German measles) is a rare illness caused by a virus. It is spread through coughs and sneezes.

Symptoms can take two to three weeks to develop. People can pass the disease to others before they even know they have it. The main symptom of rubella is a spotty rash that starts on the face or behind the ears and spreads to the neck and body. Other symptoms include swollen glands and a high temperature (fever).

Catching rubella while pregnant can be very serious for the unborn baby. It can seriously damage their sight, hearing, heart, and brain. This condition is called congenital rubella syndrome (CRS).

For more information about rubella symptoms, visit **NHS 111 Wales - Health A-Z : Rubella (German measles)** (external site).

Chickenpox (varicella)

Chickenpox (also known as varicella) spreads very easily. It is very common in the UK, and mostly affects children, but anyone can catch it. If someone hasn't had chickenpox before, there is a high risk (up to 90%) they will catch chickenpox if they are near someone who is infected.

In most cases, chickenpox is a mild illness that gets better without medical treatment, but for some people it can be very serious. Infection with chickenpox can lead to serious illnesses like severe bacterial infections of the skin, lung problems, swelling in the brain, or stroke in children.

The risk of serious illness from chickenpox is much higher than people realise.

Symptoms of chickenpox are usually worse in adults, particularly pregnant women. These individuals are more likely to develop health issues.

Symptoms of chickenpox include a rash of red, itchy spots that turn into fluid-filled blisters. The blisters then crust over to form scabs, which eventually drop off. There may be some mild flu-like symptoms before the rash appears.

For more information about chickenpox symptoms, visit **NHS 111 Wales - Health A-Z : Chickenpox** (external site).

About the MMR and MMRV vaccines

Before vaccination against measles existed, it was a very common disease and most people caught it. According to the World Health Organization, around 107,500 people died from measles around the world in 2023. Most of them were young children under 5.

The four vaccines licensed for use in the UK to protect against measles are:

- MMR vaccine – **Priorix® and MMRVaxPro®** protect against measles, mumps and rubella
- MMRV vaccine – **Priorix Tetra® and ProQuad®** protect against measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (chickenpox)

All four vaccines are live vaccines, which means they contain weakened versions of the viruses and are safe and highly effective combined vaccines.

The vaccines are usually given as an injection in the upper arm in older children and adults, although they may be given in the thigh in younger children.

A full list of the vaccine ingredients and possible side effects is available at **medicines.org.uk/emc** (external site) by entering Priorix®, MMRVaxPro®, Priorix Tetra® or ProQuad® into the search box.

MMRVaxPro® and ProQuad® contain highly purified gelatine derived from pigs. More information about this is available in **phw.nhs.wales/PorkGelatine**. People who would prefer to have a gelatine free MMR-containing vaccine can ask to have Priorix® and Priorix Tetra® (age appropriate).

Sometimes doses of an MMR-containing vaccine are given earlier than the routine appointments. This may be because a child was born in a different country, or in response to an outbreak. When this happens, additional doses may be needed.

It is safe to receive more than two doses of an MMR-containing vaccine when this is needed.

Two doses of an MMR-containing vaccine provide long-lasting protection. If a person's vaccination history is uncertain (if it is not known if they have had both doses), it is safer to have too many doses of the vaccine than not enough. MMR/MMRV containing vaccines should not be given to people who have a lowered immune system or who are pregnant.

More information about the MMR-containing vaccines, eligibility and links to resources are available at **phw.nhs.wales/MMRV-MMR**

Eligibility for MMR and MMRV vaccination

Vaccination programmes are regularly reviewed to make sure the population gets the best protection from vaccine preventable diseases. These programmes may change when research becomes available or there are new vaccines.

Prior to 1 January 2026, two doses of the MMR vaccine were routinely offered to children at 12 months and 3 years 4 months.

From **1 January 2026**, the combined MMRV vaccine replaced the MMR vaccine for both doses in the routine vaccination schedule - to offer additional protection against chickenpox. The age at which children receive their second MMRV vaccine was also changed from 3 years 4 months to **18 months of age**, offering earlier protection.

Between 1 November 2026 and 31 March 2028 a catch-up programme will also offer MMRV to eligible children born between 1 January 2020 and 31 August 2022, who have not had a chickenpox infection or two doses of a varicella containing vaccine. These children were too old to be offered the routine chickenpox vaccination when it was introduced into the UK childhood immunisation schedule. This will be offered through GP practices in Wales.

Further details on changes to the childhood schedule are available at **phw.nhs.wales/vaccines/ccs-information-for-public**

How can you help?

The NHS wants to keep the population safe and well. Please use Public Health Wales resources to share the benefits of getting protected and promote the MMR and MMRV vaccination programme with colleagues, parents and guardians, children and young people.

The NHS recommends measles vaccination, and even a small drop in the number of people having the vaccination can lead to more cases of measles. Please check that you are up to date with your MMR/MMRV vaccinations and encourage others to do so too.

If you suspect measles in your setting, seek medical advice immediately. In the event of a confirmed case of measles, an outbreak, or a need to undertake a vaccination session in your setting, please engage and work with the healthcare professionals involved.

Information and resources for schools and educational settings to support the school age vaccination programmes are available from **phw.nhs.wales/vaccines/Children-YoungPeople**

Scan me for information on measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox

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The information in this document is correct at the time of publication. For the most up-to-date information, please visit **phw.nhs.wales/vaccines**

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