

Measles, mumps and rubella

Before immunisation was available, measles, mumps and rubella were fairly common diseases that could have very serious complications:

The most common complications of **measles** infection are otitis media, pneumonia, blindness and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) ¹.

Mumps can cause complications ranging from inflammation of the pancreas and reproductive organs to deafness, meningitis (inflammation of the covering of the brain and spinal cord) and encephalitis.

Rubella can cause birth defects such as deafness and heart defects in babies whose mothers contract the illness while pregnant.

The role of MMR vaccine in preventing meningitis

Before MMR vaccine was introduced, mumps was the main cause of viral (or aseptic) meningitis – about 1,200 people (mainly children) in the UK were hospitalised each year with mumps ². Most of these cases had meningitis. Mumps was also the most frequent cause of viral encephalitis.

Measles encephalitis occurs in approximately 1 in 1000 cases of measles infection ³ and can be fatal.

Since the introduction of MMR in 1988, mumps and measles meningitis and encephalitis have virtually been eliminated.

Vaccine Uptake

Following adverse publicity about MMR in 1998, uptake of the vaccine in England fell from over 90 % to around 80 %, causing widespread concern among health professionals about the risk of outbreaks of these diseases. Similar patterns were seen in Scotland ⁴, Wales ⁵, Northern Ireland ⁶ and the Republic of Ireland ⁷.

Cases of Measles

As a result of the decline in MMR uptake, outbreaks of measles occurred in the Republic of Ireland in 2000 leading to at least two deaths ⁸. In England and Wales in 2006, at least one child has died following outbreaks of measles, the majority of which have been seen in Surrey, Sussex and South Yorkshire ⁹. Fortunately, parents' acceptance of MMR seems to be improving again and uptake rates look to be increasing ⁹.

Safety of MMR

Although MMR vaccination has had much adverse publicity, there is no factual basis for this:

Although no medicine is 100% safe, vaccines undergo stricter testing than other medicines. Over 30 years, more than 500 million doses of MMR have been given in over 100 countries, and it has an excellent safety record.

Articles published in medical journals and in the national press claiming that MMR vaccination causes autism and bowel disease have been thoroughly investigated and the evidence from several studies has shown no link between these conditions and MMR or measles vaccines.

There is no evidence that supports getting measles, mumps and rubella vaccinations separately—MMR vaccination is safer and more effective.

In recent years, many myths surrounding vaccination have developed and speculative media stories have understandably raised parental anxiety. Vital signs, Vital issues contains a large section which attempts to dispel these myths. This booklet can be downloaded from our website www.meningitis.org

Where can I go for further information and support?

Freephone helpline UK 080 88 00 33 44 Ireland 1800 41 33 444

email helpline@meningitis.org

Visit our website www.meningitis.org

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