



Briefing document: Measles

Public facing message

January 2024

Background

Measles is a highly infectious disease; one infected person can spread the disease to 12 or more people who are not immune/ not vaccinated. Measles can cause serious complications, particularly in children under one year of age, pregnant women, and the immunosuppressed. Measles can spread very easily and it can be very serious, especially in younger children. Serious complications of measles include pneumonia and encephalitis (swelling of the brain), one in five infected may need to go to hospital and it can be fatal.

The best way to protect people from measles is to get the MMR vaccine. Children are offered a first dose of MMR vaccine free of charge from their GP, as part of their routine childhood immunisations at 12 months of age. It is important it is to get the first MMR on time at 12 months and not delay because measles is more severe in young children. A second dose is offered when they are in junior infants in school from HSE school immunisation teams¹ If your child has missed their MMR vaccines they should be vaccinated as soon as possible and if you are not sure you can check with their doctor.

Reminder: Getting your child vaccinated is the best way to protect them from serious illness. In Ireland, all the recommended childhood vaccines are free

Call-to-action: Make sure your child has their MMR vaccines on-time. If your child hasn't had their MMR vaccines, contact your doctor. **They can catch-up with the vaccines they have missed.** The MMR vaccine catch-up programme is for some children who did not get the MMR vaccine when it was offered to them when they were 12 months old, or age 4-5 years old in junior infants. It is important it is to get the first MMR on time at 12 months and not delay because measles is more severe in young children. You can contact your GP surgery and ask if they are offering MMR catch-up vaccinations at this time. If they are offering MMR catch-up vaccinations, you can book your child in with their GP to get the vaccine. The vaccine is free.

1. Key information for the Public

¹ In Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal, the second dose is given by GPs



- **What is Measles?**

Measles is a very infectious illness that spreads very easily. Both children and adults can become sick with measles.

- **What are the signs and symptoms of measles?**

The symptoms of measles include:

- Cold-like symptoms such as aches and pains, a runny nose, sneezing and a cough
- Sore, red eyes that may be sensitive to light
- A temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or above (fever), which may reach around 40 degrees Celsius
- Small greyish-white spots in your mouth
- Loss of appetite
- Tiredness, irritability and a general lack of energy
- Rash – usually appears on head and neck first and spread to rest of the body

Measles can cause chest infections, fits, ear infections, swelling of the brain and brain damage. Measles can be very serious and can cause deafness, blindness and even death. Measles is worse for children under one year of age, pregnant women and people with poor immunity. Children can get measles if they have not had the MMR (Measles-Mumps-Rubella) vaccine. Further information can be found here

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/measles/>

- **What can I do to protect my family from measles?**

Every parent wants to keep their children safe. Getting the MMR vaccine is the best way to prevent it and protect your child. MMR vaccine protects against measles, mumps and rubella (German measles).

Measles is spreading in many countries in the European regions and other regions. If you are travelling abroad please ensure everyone is up to date with MMR vaccine.

- **When is the measles vaccine offered to children?**

MMR vaccine is offered to babies at 12 months of age. This vaccine is available for free from GP practices. It is important it is to get the first MMR on time at 12 months and not delay because measles is more severe in young children. Children should get a second dose when they are in Junior infants at 4-5 years of age This is usually given at school by the HSE's school immunisation team for free. (In Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal, the second MMR dose is given by GPs) Two doses of MMR vaccine are required to give the best protection.

- **If I missed a dose of the MMR vaccine, how can I catch up?**

It's never too late to catch up, contact your local doctor to make an appointment. The vaccine is free from your local doctor up until your child is 10 years old, after that your child can still get the vaccine, but there might be a charge.

- **What if I am unsure if I have had the vaccine?**

If you are unsure if you or your child has had the MMR vaccine, you can check with your doctor.



- **I have questions about the MMR, who should I talk to?**

If you have any questions be sure to talk to your doctor or Public Health Nurse — no matter what the question is. The MMR vaccine is safe, we know there is a lot of misinformation about autism and vaccinations but research has shown that vaccines do not cause autism. Research has also found that the rates of autism were the same in groups of children who received the vaccine, compared to those who did not receive the vaccine.

- **For religious reasons it's not permissible for my child to take Gelatin, is there an MMR vaccine that does not contain porcine gelatine?**

People may also have concerns because of religious reasons as gelatin is made from animal products (pork). It may be helpful to know that The Irish Council of Imams has issued a statement to say that vaccination with vaccines containing porcine gelatin is permissible. Information is available on the website of the [HSE's National Immunisation Office](#). You can Read the Irish Council of Imams statement [here](#). Information is also available for [Jewish communities](#)

- **What can I do if I think someone in my family has measles?**

Phone your doctor immediately for advice. Keep the child or adult at home and stop visitors coming to your home unless they know they are protected against measles (they have had two doses of MMR vaccine).

- **What can I do if my family has been in contact with someone with measles?**

If this is the case let your doctor know immediately and get medical advice.

Further information

Further information about vaccination is available at www.immunisation.ie

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