

20.02.13

## HEALTH PROTECTION AGENCY WARNS OF MEASLES IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Following a significant rise in measles cases in the Gloucestershire area, which has led to a number of children and adults being hospitalised, health professionals are asking parents and adults (specifically those born after 1988, after the introduction of the MMR vaccination, who may have missed out on MMR as a child) to check their Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccination history to ensure they and their children have received the required two doses of MMR.

Anyone who needs advice or is not sure about their vaccination history should contact the practice nurse at their GP practice.

The advice follows a total of 62 confirmed cases in the county between October 2012 and January 2013. This is a significant rise compared to the previous two years for Gloucestershire, for example in 2011, less than five confirmed cases were reported for the whole year.

The situation in Gloucestershire is consistent with national trends confirmed by the Health Protection Agency which show that measles is on the increase in England and Wales. The majority of cases in Gloucestershire are in children, but adults have also been affected.

Measles is caused by a very infectious virus which typically causes rash, cold-like symptoms, cough, red eyes and high fever. About one in every 15 children with measles will develop more serious complications. These can include ear and chest infections, fits, diarrhoea, encephalitis (infection of the brain), and brain damage.

The safest and most effective way to prevent measles is to ensure your child has received the routine two doses of the MMR vaccination.

MMR vaccination is part of the routine child immunisation programme, one dose is given at 13 months and a second pre-school booster is given before school. (Generally there is no need for your child to have either of these immunisations before they are due, although your doctor may consider this on an individual basis if your child has been in contact with a confirmed case).

### **Dr David Hunt, South West (North) Health Protection Unit said:**

“It is important to remember that measles isn’t a “harmless” childhood disease for some and this is why we have seen hospitalisations in Gloucestershire. Thankfully all have now fully recovered and have been discharged.

“However, these hospitalisations reinforce how important it is to make sure that you and your children are protected and that is why we are urging the community to make sure that children are fully immunised and have had both doses of the MMR vaccine.”

**Dr Jeremy Welch, Tewkesbury GP and member of the Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group Shadow Board, added:**

“Measles is a highly infectious and potentially dangerous illness which spreads very easily. If you have missed out on the MMR vaccination in the past it’s always possible for a catch-up. Just contact your local GP practice for an appointment.”

The local community is also being advised that anyone displaying symptoms of measles should take the following steps to prevent spreading the disease to others:

- Keep away from school or work and away from others for five days from when the rash first appeared.
- You should also avoid coming into contact with people who may be particularly vulnerable to complications as a result of exposure to measles. This includes people with weakened immune systems, infants under the age of one, and pregnant women.
- It is also very important **NOT** to go to your GP practice or A&E department if you or your child has symptoms of measles. If you do, you risk passing on the infection to others in the waiting room. If your child has symptoms of the disease please telephone your GP surgery in the first instance.

#### **Signs and Symptoms:**

Measles is an infectious viral illness that is spread by droplets in the air when infected people cough or sneeze.

The following symptoms are commonly seen in measles infection:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore and watering eyes
- Widespread rash that develops 3-4 days after the onset of the illness, starting with the face and head and spreading down the body.

Although most people will get over measles without too many problems, a significant number will develop complications including ear infection, diarrhoea, pneumonia or meningitis.

Complications are more likely in those who have a weakened immune system or in infants under the age of 1 year. Measles can also cause problems in pregnancy. People in these categories who are recent contacts of a definite case of measles and who are not immune may be offered vaccination.

Since the introduction of measles vaccine, and especially since the introduction of MMR vaccine in 1988, numbers of cases have reduced to low levels.

#### **Where can I get more information about measles and the MMR vaccine?**

More information about measles is available from the Health Protection Agency website at:

[http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics\\_az/measles/background.htm](http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/measles/background.htm)

More information about the MMR vaccine is available from the NHS Immunisation website at:

<http://www.immunisation.nhs.uk/Vaccines/MMR> and at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)