



Measles / Mumps / Rubella Immunisation (MMR)

The illnesses prevented

Measles is a highly infectious illness caused by the measles virus. Beginning like a bad cold, the child then develops a fever and a rash. The child always feels miserable and may be unwell with a bad cough and a high temperature. Measles is much more serious than most people think. In fact, of all childhood infections, it is the one most likely to cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), sometimes resulting in brain damage. It can also cause convulsions, ear infections, bronchitis and pneumonia, which can lead to long-term lung troubles. Each year a number of children die from measles. In developing countries it is a major cause of childhood death.

Mumps is usually a mild illness but it can have serious complications. It is the most common cause of viral meningitis in children under 15. Other complications include permanent deafness and sterility. About 1200 people are admitted to hospital each year in England and Wales with complications from mumps. Mumps is equally dangerous for boys and girls.

Rubella (German Measles) is a mild disease but if a pregnant woman who is not immune catches it, then her unborn baby can be damaged. The risk is especially high if it is caught in the first four months of pregnancy. The baby may then be born deaf, blind and with heart and brain damage. The most likely way for a mother to catch rubella is through contact with a small child (boy or girl) who has it. So it's important for all children to be immunised.

The immunisation

The immunisations against measles, mumps and rubella are all combined into one injection. This combined vaccine is known as MMR and it replaces the measles immunisation. Two injections are recommended. The best time to have the first injection is between 12 and 15 months, but it can still be given at any later age. Even if you think your child has already had one of these diseases or the measles-only immunisation, your child should still have the MMR immunisation. It is very safe and very effective.

A second dose is recommended 3 years after the first dose. This is usually given aged 4-5 years at the same time as the 'pre-school booster' for diphtheria, tetanus and polio.

Are there any side effects?

Most children are perfectly well after having the MMR immunisation. However, it is quite common for children to develop a mild fever and a faint rash, a week to ten days later, which should only last for two to three days. A few children develop mild swollen faces (like a mild form of mumps) about three weeks after MMR. Any swelling will gradually go down. Neither of these reactions is infectious or serious. Paracetamol (Calpol, Disprol etc) may be given to help settle these minor reactions.

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