

North West



To: All Head Teachers

16 June 2011

Dear Parent or Guardian

Cheshire & Merseyside  
Health Protection Unit

Health Protection Agency

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### Protect your child against measles

There is a large measles epidemic in France and measles outbreaks across Europe. 10,000 people – mainly children and young adults have caught measles this year in mainland Europe and four people have died. Here in England, the number of people catching measles is increasing. There have been 334 cases confirmed in the first 4 months of 2011, compared with 374 for the whole of 2010. There is also an outbreak of measles on the Wirral.

**If your child has not had two doses of MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine, he or she is at risk of developing measles. Contact your doctor for a free MMR.**

Measles can be serious, leading to pneumonia and even death. It is highly infectious and anyone who has not had two doses of MMR vaccine can catch it.

Two doses of MMR vaccine protect against measles and also against mumps and rubella. The first dose of the MMR vaccine is given to children shortly after their 1st birthday. Children receive their second dose before they start school – usually once they are 3 years and 4 months old. It is never too late to get vaccinated if a child or young person has missed out. We are running a campaign to get everyone under 25 years old vaccinated if they have missed one or two of the MMR vaccines they need.

If your child has missed their 1<sup>st</sup> or second MMR vaccine, contact your doctor now. If you have questions, ask your health visitor, practice nurse or GP or see <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Information/index.htm>

I hope you will take up this opportunity to ensure your child is protected as soon as possible

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam Ghebrehewet".

Dr Sam Ghebrehewet  
Interim Unit Director  
Cheshire & Merseyside HPU

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paula Grey".

Dr Paula Grey  
Director of Public Health  
Liverpool PCT

## **Information about MMR**

### **What diseases does MMR protect against?**

- Measles is caused by a highly infectious virus. Nearly everyone who catches measles virus will have a high fever, a rash and be unwell. Children have to spend about five days in bed and may be off school for ten days. Adults are likely to be ill for longer. It is not possible to tell who will be seriously affected by measles. The complications of measles affect one in every 15 children. Complications include chest infections, fits, encephalitis (swelling of the brain) and brain damage. In very serious cases, measles kills.
- Mumps is caused by a virus which causes a fever, a headache, and painful, swollen glands in the face, neck and jaw. It can result in permanent deafness, viral meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain) and encephalitis. Rarely, it causes painful swelling of the testicles in males and the ovaries in females. Mumps lasts about seven to ten days.
- Rubella (German measles) is a disease caused by a virus. In children it is usually mild and may go unnoticed. It causes a short-lived rash, swollen glands and a sore throat. Rubella is very serious for unborn babies. It can seriously damage their sight, hearing, heart and brain. Rubella infection in the first three months of pregnancy causes damage to the unborn baby in up to nine out of ten cases. This condition is called congenital rubella syndrome (CRS). In many cases, pregnant women catch rubella from their own, or their friends' children.

### **Advice about travelling with young children**

#### **If children below 1 year of age are travelling to European countries with reported measles outbreaks, should they have the first dose of MMR vaccine early, prior to travel?**

For infants travelling on longer breaks to areas where local outbreaks have been reported and who are likely to be mixing with local families, MMR vaccine may be given as early as from 6 months of age. They will still need to get their vaccines again at the usual time. Speak to your GP for advice.

#### **If preschool children (who have not had the 2<sup>nd</sup> dose of MMR) are travelling to European countries with reported measles outbreaks, should they have the 2<sup>nd</sup> dose of MMR vaccine early, prior to travel?**

If your child is 3 years and 4 months old or over, they should have already received an invitation for their second MMR vaccination. If they have not yet been invited, contact your doctor or health visitor to make an appointment.

For children travelling on longer breaks to areas where local outbreaks have been reported and who are likely to be mixing with local families, your doctor may advise that he or she receive their 2<sup>nd</sup> dose early prior to travel. Speak to your GP for advice.