IMMUNISATIONS

Key messages

It is NEVER too late for children to be immunised.

‘The two public health interventions
that have had the greatest impact
on the world’s health
are clean water and vaccines’

- World Health Organization

MMR is the safest way to protect children
against measles, mumps and rubella.

Common questions about immunisations

Can Children allergic to eggs have MMR vaccine?

MMR vaccine can safely be given even to children who have had a severe allergy (anaphylactic reaction) to egg. If you have any concerns, talk to your practice nurse, health visitor or doctor.

Can MMR cause autism?

There is no credible evidence to support the link between MMR vaccine and autism. MMR vaccine has been used widely and safely around the world for more than 30 years. Over 500 million doses have been given in over 100 countries. Numerous studies have failed to find any link between MMR and autism.

MMR is the safest way to protect your child against measles, mumps and rubella.

If a child has an allergy should they still have their vaccinations?

Yes, they should. Asthma, eczema, food intolerances and allergies do NOT prevent children from having any of their vaccinations. If you have any questions, speak to your doctor, practice nurse or health visitor.

Myths about childhood immunisations

It is a **MYTH** that you have to avoid or delay your child's vaccination if he or she has a minor infection without a fever, such as a cough or cold or a family history of bad reactions to vaccinations.

It is a **MYTH** that immunisations should be avoided if children have conditions such as asthma, hay fever, or eczema.

It's a dangerous **MYTH** that homeopathy can be used as an alternative to vaccinations to protect children against potentially serious infections. In fact, there's no evidence that homeopathy can protect children against disease.

It's a **MYTH** that it is unsafe to take your baby swimming around the time of a vaccination. In fact, you can take your baby swimming at any time before and after their vaccinations.

Immunisation Schedule	
At birth – 1 week	BCG is usually offered to babies at birth, either at hospital or in the community by the immunisation nurse within the health visiting team.
At 8 weeks	Immunisations against Diptheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Polio, Haemophilus Influenza type B, and Pnemococcal infection. Rotavirus by mouth.
At 3 Months	Immunisations against Diptheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Polio, Haemophilus Influenza type B, and Meningococcus group C. Rotavirus by mouth.
At 4 Months	Immunisations against Diptheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Polio, Haemophilus Influenza type B, Pnemococcal infection and Meningococcus group C.
At 13 Months	Immunisation against Pnemococcal infection and Meningococcus group C, Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) and pneumococcal infection.
At 3 Years and four months	Immunisations against Diptheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Polio, Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR)
Apart from the BCG, all immunisations are usually delivered by GP practices.	

What is diphtheria?

Diphtheria is a serious disease that usually begins with a sore throat and can quickly cause breathing problems. It can damage the heart and nervous system and, in severe cases, it can kill. Before the diphtheria vaccine was introduced in this country, there were up to 70,000 cases of diphtheria a year, causing up to 5000 deaths.

What is tetanus?

Tetanus is a disease affecting the nervous system which can lead to muscle spasms, cause breathing problems and can kill. It is caused when germs that are found in soil and manure get into the body through open cuts or burns. Tetanus cannot be passed from person to person.

What is pertussis (whooping cough)?

Whooping cough is a disease that can cause long bouts of coughing and choking, making it hard to breathe. Whooping cough can last for up to 10 weeks. Babies under one year of age are most at risk from whooping cough. For these babies, the disease is very serious and it can kill. It is not usually so serious in older children. Before the pertussis vaccine was introduced, the average number of cases of whooping cough reported each year in the UK was 120,000, and 92 children died in the year before the vaccine was introduced.

What is polio?

Polio is a virus that attacks the nervous system and can cause permanent paralysis of muscles. If it affects the chest muscles or the brain, polio can kill. Before the polio vaccine was introduced, there were as many as 8000 cases of polio in the UK in epidemic years. Because of the continued success of the polio vaccination, there have been no cases of natural polio infection in the UK for over 20 years (the last case was in 1984).

What is Hib?

Hib is an infection caused by Haemophilus influenzae type b bacteria. It can lead to a number of major illnesses such as blood poisoning (septicaemia), pneumonia and meningitis. The Hib vaccine only protects your baby against the type of meningitis caused by the Haemophilus influenzae type b bacteria – it does not protect against any other causes of meningitis. The illnesses caused by Hib can kill if they are not treated quickly. Before the Hib vaccine was introduced, there were about 800 cases of Hib in young children every year.

And since it's been introduced, the number of children under five years of age with Hib has fallen by 99%.

What is pneumococcal infection?

Pneumococcal (pronounced newmocockal) infection is one of the commonest causes of meningitis but it also causes ear infections (otitis media), pneumonia and some other serious illnesses.

PCV provides some protection against one of the commonest causes of meningitis, and also against other conditions such as severe ear infections (otitis media), and pneumonia caused by pneumococcal bacteria. This vaccine does not protect against all types of pneumococcal bacteria and does not protect against meningitis caused by other bacteria or viruses (see the meningitis and septicaemia section on page 35).

What is measles?

Measles is caused by a very infectious virus. Nearly everyone who catches it will have a high fever, a rash and generally be unwell. Children often have to spend about five days in bed and could be off school for 10 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. The complications include chest infections, fits, encephalitis (infection of the brain), and brain damage. In very serious cases, measles can kill. In 1987 (the year before the MMR vaccine was introduced in the UK), 86,000 children caught measles and 16 died.

Measles is one of the most infectious diseases known. A cough or a sneeze can spread the measles virus over a wide area. Because it's so infectious, the chances are your child will get measles if he or she is not protected and comes into contact with someone who has measles.

What is mumps?

Mumps is caused by a virus which can lead to fever, headache, and painful, swollen glands in the face, neck and jaw. It can result in permanent deafness, viral meningitis (infection 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 10 days. Before the MMR vaccine was introduced, about 1200 people a year in the UK went into hospital because of mumps. Mumps is spread in the same way as measles. It is about as infectious as flu.

Egg allergies

The MMR vaccine can safely be given to children who have had a severe allergy (anaphylactic reaction) to egg. This is because MMR vaccine is grown on chick cells, not the egg white or yolk. If you have any concerns, talk to your health visitor, practice nurse or doctor.

What is rubella?
Rubella (German measles) is also caused by a virus. In children it is usually mild and can go unnoticed. It causes a shortlived rash, swollen glands and a sore throat. Rubella is very serious for unborn babies. It can seriously damage their sight, hearing, heart and brain. This condition is called congenital rubella syndrome (CRS). Rubella infection in the first three months of pregnancy causes damage to the unborn baby in nine out of 10 cases. In many of the cases, pregnant women caught rubella from their own, or their friends', children. In the five years before the MMR vaccine was introduced, about 43 babies a year were born in the UK with congenital rubella syndrome. Rubella is spread in the same way as measles and mumps. It is about as infectious as flu.

MMR and autism
There have been many stories in the media linking MMR with autism. Some parents delayed their child's MMR immunisation or didn't have it at all, which led to outbreaks of measles. However, independent experts from around the world have found no scientific evidence for such a link. In fact, there is now a large amount of evidence showing that there is no link.

MMR is the safest way to protect children against measles, mumps and rubella.

BCG vaccine protects babies against tuberculosis (TB)

What is TB?
TB is an infection that usually affects the lungs. It can also affect other parts of the body, such as the lymph glands, bones, joints and kidneys. Most cases can be cured with treatment. TB can also cause a very serious form of meningitis.

What is Rotavirus?
Rotavirus is a highly infectious stomach bug that typically strikes babies and young children, causing an unpleasant bout of diarrhoea, sometimes with vomiting, tummy ache and fever. Most children recover at home within a few days, but nearly one in five will need to see their doctor, and one in 10 of these end up in hospital as a result of complications such as extreme dehydration. A very small number of children die from rotavirus infection each year.
The rotavirus vaccine is expected to prevent four out of five cases of vomiting and diarrhoea caused by rotavirus.
An oral vaccine against rotavirus infection, called Rotarix, is given as two doses for babies aged 2 months and 3 months alongside their other routine childhood vaccinations.

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