

Press release: Measles and summer travel to Europe

Young people are encouraged to make sure they have had both doses of the MMR vaccine before going on holiday to Europe where there are large outbreaks of measles.

Cases of measles also continue to rise across England in unvaccinated people of this age.

The vaccine is available free to anyone who has not received both doses as a child. It protects against measles, mumps and rubella, all of which can be very serious diseases and are highly infectious.

While vaccine uptake levels in the UK in young children are currently very high, coverage levels dipped to a low of 80% in 2003. This means that there are significant numbers of unprotected teenagers and young adults who could catch measles both in England, particularly in environments of close mixing such as summer festivals and when they travel abroad for the summer holidays.

Measles is a highly infectious viral illness that can sometimes lead to serious complications and can be fatal in very rare cases so getting protected by taking up the offer of vaccination is crucial.

Between 1 January 2018 and 18 June 2018 there have been 643 laboratory confirmed measles cases in England. Cases were reported in most areas with London (225), the South-East (137), West Midlands (82), South-West (79), and Yorkshire and Humberside (74) reporting the most cases (based on provisional figures).

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that to prevent outbreaks of disease, 95% of people need to have received the MMR vaccine.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisation at Public Health England (PHE), said:

In the early 2000s there was a fall in MMR vaccination coverage in children and as a consequence, we are now seeing measles cases in young adults. Measles can be more serious in adults with a higher likelihood of hospitalisation and complications arising.

Measles is circulating in England and the rest of Europe. We often think about what travel-related vaccines we might need before going on holiday, but it's also important to check that we are up to date with routine vaccinations like MMR.

If you are unsure if you have had 2 doses of MMR call your GP practice to check and catch up if needed.

Parents are also urged to take up the offer of MMR vaccination for their children at 1 year old and as a pre-school booster at 3 years and 4 months old.