

# Prime Minister orders urgent action to improve vaccination uptake

Urgent action to boost the number of children and young people receiving life-saving vaccinations will be set out by the Prime Minister today.

Boris Johnson will visit a hospital in the South West and lay out a number of measures designed to improve vaccination rates, including for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR).

While confidence in the UK's world-leading vaccination programme remains high – with uptake exceeding 90% for most childhood immunisations – there has been a small but steady decline in coverage in recent years.

It means that the UK has lost its 'measles-free' status with the World Health Organisation (WHO) – three years after the virus was eliminated in the country. The WHO have stated that in the first six months of 2019 reported measles cases globally are almost three times as many as the same time last year. Measles is now endemic in countries including France, Germany and Italy.

The PM has now called for health leaders to renew their efforts to meet 95% for both doses of MMR. Currently just 87% of children are getting their second dose of the jab, which has likely contributed to the spread of measles.

Action to achieve this includes:

- NHS England writing to GPs urging them to promote 'catch up' vaccination programmes for MMR for 10-11 year olds, as well as all those 5-25 year olds who have not had two doses of the jab;
- Strengthening the role of local immunisation coordinators – healthcare professionals that promote vaccines particularly with hard-to-reach families. This includes supporting areas with low uptake and tailoring specific local interventions to under-vaccinated communities;
- Addressing parents' concerns about vaccines by updating the advice on NHS.uk specifically to address misleading information about the dangers of vaccines, by giving people NHS-approved, evidence-based and trusted advice on vaccines including through a new website;
- Calling a summit of social media companies to discuss how they can play their part in promoting accurate information about vaccination; and
- The Department for Health and Social Care – working with Public Health England and NHS England – delivering a comprehensive strategy to address the issue in the Autumn.

Ahead of the hospital visit Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

After a period of progress where we were once able to declare Britain measles free, we've now seen hundreds of cases of measles

in the UK this year. One case of this horrible disease is too many, and I am determined to step up our efforts to tackle its spread.

This is a global challenge and there's a number of reasons why people don't get themselves or their children the vaccines they need, but we need decisive action across our health service and society to make sure communities are properly immunised.

From reassuring parents about the safety of vaccines, to making sure people are attending follow-up appointments, we can and must do more to halt the spread of infectious, treatable diseases in modern-day Britain.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

It's easy to forget how devastating measles can be precisely because vaccines are so effective at preventing it in the first place.

With this strategy, the whole health system will come together to renew focus on vaccinations – especially for our children – and this time we will eliminate measles for good.

The Prime Minister's visit to the South West is part of a series of visits to hospitals he is taking. He will meet doctors and nurses, hearing directly from them about what support they think the NHS needs so it can continue to be the best healthcare service in the world.

Measles elimination status means that the virus is no longer circulating permanently in a country. The UK achieved measles-free status in 2016 after three years of limited spread due to high vaccination rates, but measles has since been spreading slowly in the UK for over 12 months.

In the first quarter of 2019, there were 231 confirmed cases of measles in the UK. Many of these were acquired abroad with some onward spread in under-vaccinated communities.

The Department for Health's strategy to be published in the Autumn is also expected to:

- Ask the NHS to use technology to identify who may have missed a vaccination and make booking appointments easier, such as improved call/recall systems for those accessing immunisations, and more consistent use of these systems across UK healthcare to remind people of their vaccine appointments.

- As part of the GP contract review, examine wider questions of improving GP capacity to allow additional immunisation appointments – while also asking NHS England to consider other settings outside of a GP for vaccinations.
- Develop a major campaign with NHS England and Improvement, Public Health England and GP practices to support the importance of key vaccinations in protecting against potentially dangerous diseases.
- Work with DFE to explore more ways in which students can be informed about their health and wellbeing including the value of vaccinations – plus enabling them to critically assess misinformation spread online about certain vaccines.

This comes as part of a wider government drive on Prevention, following the publication of the Prevention Green Paper last month.

Head of Immunisation at Public Health England Dr Mary Ramsay said:

Losing our 'measles-free' status is a stark reminder of how important it is that every eligible person gets vaccinated. Elimination can only be sustained by maintaining and improving coverage of the MMR vaccine.

Measles is one of the most infectious diseases known to man – only one person travelling back to an area with lower vaccination rates can lead to an outbreak. Anyone who has not received two doses of MMR vaccine is always at risk.

Making it as easy as possible for parents to access vaccines so that they can offer their children the best possible start in life is a priority for us, DHSC and for NHS England. Through our Value of Vaccines campaign we'll be using all opportunities to remind people to get two doses of MMR vaccine – whether that's new parents, school children or younger adults. This will be crucial to the UK achieving elimination status again in future.