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Monday, 23 February 2026

Dear Parent/Carer/Guardian,

Increasing measles cases – make sure you and your children are protected

There has been a significant increase in measles cases in North London in recent weeks and we are seeing more cases in Islington. Measles is a painful and serious illness which can lead to hospitalisation and death. Around 1 in 5 children who have caught measles in the North London outbreak have required hospitalisation.

Measles is one of the most infectious diseases in the world and spreads very easily. If your child (or you as an adult) are not fully vaccinated against measles with 2 doses of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine, then you are at risk of developing measles (unless you have had measles in the past). This letter provides information about what you should do to protect your health and others around you.

What should you do now?

1. Read the information about signs and symptoms of measles

Measles is an infection that spreads very easily. It can occur suddenly, and people can become unwell quickly. At the end of this letter, there is more information about measles, please read this to learn more about the symptoms of measles, how it spreads and about vaccination against measles. There is also further information available about measles at www.nhs.uk/conditions/measles.

2. Check if your children (and you) have had the MMR vaccinations

Look in the child's Red Book or contact your GP practice. If vaccinations are missing, then you can book catchups with your GP.

3. Arrange MMR vaccination if you/your child are not vaccinated

You can get vaccinated at your GP practice, the vaccine is available for free and to anyone who has not had their MMR. In addition, Vaccination UK are providing community clinics in Islington and neighbouring areas. You do not need to be registered with a GP to attend. If your child needs to catch up on their vaccinations, then please go to this link and book an appointment: Catch-up clinics. You can also call 0208 017 7925 or email: Islington@vaccinationuk.co.uk

4. **Tell your child's nursery or school, if you think your child may have measles**
5. **Contact your GP or call NHS 111 if you or your child becomes unwell with a high temperature with a cough, runny nose, sore red eyes or rash.** You should call your GP before going to the GP practice. This is to avoid spreading measles to others.

If someone is thought to have measles, they should stay away from their education or childcare setting, or work, for at least 4 days from when the rash first appears. Measles is very infectious, if your child is identified as being a close contact of a person with measles and they are unvaccinated they may be excluded from school for 21 days (following national guidelines). They should also avoid close contact with infants under 12 months, people who are pregnant and people with weakened immune systems.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan O'Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Jonathan O'Sullivan,
Director of Public Health
Islington Council

Measles factsheet

What measles is

Measles infection is caused by a virus, and spreads between people very easily. Once symptoms start, people can become unwell quickly. You can get measles at any age, but it is often young children who catch it.

How measles spreads

You can catch measles through close contact with someone who has measles. This could be from the air when they cough or sneeze, or by touching things that someone with measles has coughed or sneezed on. Measles spreads very easily in households and in other places where people mix closely together.

You can be protected from catching measles if you have had 2 doses of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine, or if you have had the infection before. A person with measles can spread the infection in the 4 days before they get the rash until 4 days after they develop their rash.

Symptoms of measles

Symptoms of measles usually start between 10 and 12 days after catching the infection. Sometimes it can take up to 21 days for any symptoms to appear. Measles usually starts with cold-like symptoms. The first symptoms of measles include:

- a high temperature
- a runny or blocked nose
- sneezing
- a cough
- red, sore, watery eyes
- Small white spots may appear inside the cheeks and on the back of the lips a few days later. These spots usually last a few days.
- A rash usually appears 2 to 4 days after the cold-like symptoms started. The rash starts on the face and behind the ears before spreading to the rest of the body. The spots of the measles rash can sometimes be raised. They may join to form blotchy patches. They are not usually itchy. The rash looks brown or red on white skin. It may be harder to see on brown and black skin.

How serious is measles?

Around 1 in 15 people with measles can become seriously unwell. Younger children, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to become seriously unwell.

The more serious complications of measles can include:

- ear infections
- lung infection
- diarrhoea
- dehydration
- fits (which are less common)

Measles infection during pregnancy can result in the loss or early birth of the baby

If you would like this document in large print or Braille, audiotape, easy read or in another language, please telephone 020 7527 2000.

Preventing measles

Having the MMR vaccine is the best way to prevent measles. In the UK, children are offered vaccination as part of the routine childhood immunisation schedule. Previously, this was delivered by two doses of Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR), at 1 year and at 3 years and 4 months of age. Since 1st January 2026, the schedule has changed; children are now offered two doses of MMRV vaccination, which adds protection against chickenpox (Varicella). The first dose of the MMRV vaccine is given at 12 months, and the second dose of MMRV is given earlier, at a new 18-month appointment. While one dose is highly effective, the second dose acts as a booster, ensuring lifelong and maximum protection (up to 99% for measles). Anyone who has missed out on one or both doses of MMR can get a catch-up vaccine through their GP.

If your child is identified as a close contact of someone with measles, sometimes your doctor may recommend the MMR vaccine is given earlier than these scheduled doses. If a dose is given to an infant aged under 12 months then the usual 2 doses of MMR still need to be given at the usual times (with a minimum of 1 month gap between any doses).

If someone has missed a dose or are unsure if they have had any vaccinations, the vaccine can be given at any age. Parents and guardians can check their child's red book for their vaccination records. Pregnant women or people with weakened immune systems should not have the vaccine. If they think they have had contact with someone with measles they should speak to their GP or midwife for further advice.

For more information on MMR vaccinations visit:
<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/mmr-vaccine>