

**Over the last few months there have been a lot of TV and newspaper reports about MMR vaccine. This leaflet tries to give you the facts behind the headlines. If you feel you need more information please talk to your GP, health visitor or practice nurse.**

### What is MMR?

MMR vaccine protects your child against measles, mumps and rubella (German measles). It is given to children at 12 to 15 months and again, as a booster, before they go to school. Since MMR was introduced in the UK in 1988 the number of children catching these diseases has fallen to an all-time low.

- Measles vaccine prevents deaths and complications from measles, a disease that can still be serious.
- Mumps vaccine prevents mumps, which was the biggest cause of viral meningitis in children.
- Rubella vaccine prevents babies being damaged if their mother catches rubella when pregnant.

MMR can prevent these diseases in a combined injection.

### How does MMR work?

MMR contains three separate vaccines in one injection. The vaccines work at different times. About a week to 10 days after the MMR immunisation some children become feverish, develop a measles-like rash and go off their food – as the measles part of the vaccine starts to work. About three weeks after the injection a child might occasionally get a mild form of mumps as the mumps part of MMR kicks in. Your child may, very rarely, get a rash of small bruise-like spots due to the rubella part of the immunisation about 2 weeks after MMR. If you see spots like this, show them to your doctor.

Occasionally, children do have a bad reaction to the MMR vaccine. About one in a thousand will have a fit after becoming feverish. There is no evidence that this reaction causes long term problems. A child who has measles is 10 times more likely to have a fit as a result of the illness.

## MMR – The Facts

- MMR vaccine protects children against measles, mumps and rubella.
- In 26 years, 250 million doses of MMR have been given in over 40 countries. It has an excellent safety record.
- There is no evidence of any link between MMR and autism or Crohn's disease.
- Giving the vaccines separately may be harmful. It leaves children open to the risk of catching measles, mumps or rubella.
- Where MMR is available, no countries recommend giving all the vaccines separately.
- Measles is a highly infectious disease and it kills and disables both adults and children.
- In the last year before MMR was introduced in England, 86,000 children caught measles and 16 died.
- Mumps was the leading cause of viral meningitis in children under 15 years before the introduction of MMR vaccine. Now it is virtually eliminated.
- Rubella damage to unborn babies is devastating; in many cases pregnant women catch rubella from their own or their friends' children.

MMR protects your child and your family against measles, mumps and rubella. Because of MMR these three diseases are no longer risks. If children go unprotected the diseases will come back.

**If you missed your MMR appointment, you can get the immunisation at any time.**

Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) has been reported very rarely after immunisation (about one case in every million immunisations), but the risk of children developing encephalitis after the measles immunisation is no higher than the risk of children developing encephalitis without the vaccine. And encephalitis happens in one in every 5000 children who get measles.

The risks of the diseases are far greater than any risks from MMR. Long-term follow-up of children who have had measles vaccine shows that they had fewer hospital admissions than unimmunised children.

### What about reports of links between measles, MMR and Crohn's disease?

It has been suggested that measles viruses, either from the natural disease or the vaccine, might stay in the bowel and cause a bowel disorder called Crohn's disease. Careful independent studies in this country and abroad, using the most sensitive tests, have not found measles viruses in the bowel of people with Crohn's disease. Also, Crohn's disease is no more common in immunised people than in people who have not been immunised. The conclusion of experts from all over the world, including the World Health Organization, is that the evidence is firmly against any link between measles and MMR vaccines and Crohn's disease.

### What about reports of links between autism and MMR? Is this really a risk?

No. Autism was well-known long before MMR was ever used in this country. Although autism is recognised more often now than in the past, the increases were going on long before MMR was introduced. Parents often first notice signs of autism in children after their first birthday, and MMR is usually given when children are 12 to 15 months old, so it's possible to see how people might think that there is a link with MMR. But, there is no evidence, other than coincidence, to link MMR with autism.

## Have children been followed up long enough after MMR to know it's safe?

In the US, MMR has been given for more than 25 years and around 200 million doses have been used. Autism and Crohn's disease have not been linked with MMR there. In Finland, where children have been given two doses of MMR since 1982, reactions reported after MMR were followed up. There were no reports of permanent damage due to the vaccine. A special study in Finland also showed no link between MMR and autism or Crohn's disease.

## Wouldn't it be better for children to have the vaccines separately?

No. Giving the vaccines separately would leave children exposed to measles or mumps or rubella. These can be serious and even fatal. It has been said that giving the three viruses together overloads children's immune systems. Studies show this is not the case and children's immune systems make excellent responses, protecting them against these diseases.

**There is no evidence of any link between MMR and autism or Crohn's disease.**

**MMR protects children from three illnesses that can be very serious. And it does it in two doses. It may be harmful to give the vaccines separately.**

**You can get more information from your GP, health visitor or practice nurse. Please do not hesitate to ask.**

immunisation

THE SAFEST WAY TO PROTECT YOUR CHILD

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