



"Every parent wants the best for their child. I know that deciding what is best can sometimes be difficult. Some of the worrying things said about MMR vaccine

recently may have caused you some doubts about whether giving your child MMR is the right thing to do. Unfortunately newspaper headlines don't always give the full story. In this leaflet we have given you the facts to help you make up your mind.

"I have no doubt that the best thing you can do for your child is to give him or her the MMR vaccine. This is the safest way for you to protect your children against the dangers of measles, mumps and rubella".

Dr Henrietta Campbell CB  
Chief Medical Officer - Northern Ireland



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01/03

the facts about

# MMMR

vaccine



protect your child be wise - immunise

**This leaflet contains the facts about the MMR vaccine. If you want to talk over this information please contact your GP, health visitor or practice nurse. You may also find it helpful to visit the immunisation website at [www.immunisation.org.uk](http://www.immunisation.org.uk)**

### **What is MMR?**

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

**Measles, mumps and rubella can all have serious complications.**

- Measles can cause ear infections, respiratory problems and meningitis/encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). It has a 1 in 2,500 — 5,000 chance of causing death.
- Mumps can cause deafness usually with partial or complete recovery and swollen, painful testicles in older boys and men. It was the biggest cause of viral meningitis in children.
- Rubella can also cause inflammation of the brain and can affect blood clotting. In pregnant women it can cause miscarriage or major health problems for their babies such as blindness, deafness, heart problems or brain damage.

It is important to remember that without the MMR vaccine nearly every child will get all three diseases.

## Does MMR have any side effects?

As with all medicines, there are some side effects associated with vaccinations. Most of these are minor and last for only a short time, for example, redness and swelling at the injection site.

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. Your child may, very rarely, get a rash of small bruise-like spots due to the rubella part of the immunisation about two weeks after MMR. This usually gets better on its own but if you see spots like this, show them to your doctor. About three weeks after the injection a child might occasionally get a mild form of mumps as the mumps part of MMR kicks in.

Occasionally, children do have a bad reaction to the MMR vaccine. About 1 in 1,000 will have a fit caused by a high temperature due to the measles part of the vaccine. There is no evidence that this causes long term problems. A child who has measles is 5 times more likely to have a fit as a result of the illness.

Vaccines can also cause allergic reactions. These are very rare, about 1 case in 100,000 immunisations. Although they are worrying when they happen, treatment leads to a rapid and full recovery.

Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) has been reported in about one case in every million immunisations. This is no higher than the chance of any child developing encephalitis without the vaccine. But measles causes encephalitis in 1 in every 5,000 children who get the disease.

Comparisons of the side effects of MMR with the side effects of having measles, mumps or rubella show that the vaccine is far safer than the diseases.

Complications	Rate after natural disease	Rate after 1st dose of MMR
Fits (due to high temperature)	1 in 200	1 in 1,000
Meningitis/inflammation of the brain (encephalitis)	1 in 200 to 1 in 5,000	1 in 1,000,000
Conditions affecting blood clotting	1 in 3,000	1 in 24,000
Death (depending on age)	1 in 2,500 to 1 in 5,000	None

# Facts about the MMR vaccine

- MMR vaccine protects children against measles, mumps and rubella.
- In nearly 30 years, 500 million doses of MMR have been given in over 93 countries. It has an excellent safety record.
- There is no evidence of any link between MMR and autism or bowel 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.
- In 1987, the last year before MMR was introduced in the UK, 97,000 children caught measles and 19 died. A recent outbreak due to low vaccine uptake in Dublin left two children dead.

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

- Measles is a highly infectious disease and it kills and disables children.
- Mumps was the leading cause of viral meningitis in children under 15 years before the MMR vaccine was introduced. 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. If children go unprotected, by waiting to have all the injections separately, the diseases will come back.

## What about the reports of links between autism and MMR?

Although autism is increasingly recognised now, the increases were going on long before MMR was introduced. Parents often first notice signs of autism in children after their first birthday. MMR is usually given to children at about this age, but this doesn't mean that MMR causes autism.

A major study of all autistic children born since 1979 in North London was set up to look at the possible link with MMR. There was no sudden increase in rates of autism when the vaccine was introduced in 1988. The study concludes that MMR vaccine did not cause autism.

As a result of this and other studies, doctors here and around the world have agreed that there is no link between MMR and autism.

## What about reports of links between bowel disease and MMR?

Careful independent studies in the UK and abroad have led to the conclusion that evidence is firmly against any link between the MMR vaccine and bowel disease.

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

In the USA, MMR has been given for nearly 30 years and over 200 million doses have been used. In Finland, where children have been given 2 doses of MMR since 1982, reactions reported after MMR were followed up over 14 years. There were no reports of permanent damage due to the vaccine. In fact, MMR has been shown to be a highly effective vaccine with an outstanding safety record.

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

Giving the vaccines separately would mean having six injections instead of two and would leave children exposed to two of the diseases for at least a year. These diseases can be serious and even fatal. It has been said that giving the three vaccines together overloads children's immune systems. This is not the case. Children's immune systems make excellent responses protecting them against these diseases.

No country in the world recommends MMR being given as three separate vaccines. There is no evidence that giving the vaccines separately is any safer, so we could be causing harm without doing any good.

The support of a wide range of medical and nursing professionals for the MMR vaccine is shown by the following statement:

**"As professionals intimately involved in the long-term care of children, as well as in the immunisation programme, we wholeheartedly endorse the current policy of using the combined MMR vaccine".**

**Joint statement issued on behalf of the**  
Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health  
Royal College of General Practitioners  
Royal College of Nursing  
Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association  
Faculty of Public Health Medicine

- There is no evidence of any link between MMR and autism or bowel disease.
- MMR protects children from three serious illnesses by two injections. This ensures the children get maximum protection in the most effective way.
- You can get more information from your GP, health visitor or practice nurse. Please do not hesitate to ask.