

Dudley Health Protection Team **Schools Update-September 2023**

The health protection team hope you have had a good summer break. Once again, thank you all for your continued hard work in supporting the health protection of the children and staff in your schools and early years communities. Please see below an update regarding flu (including important information about this year's flu vaccination programme in schools), and information about measles and the MMR vaccine.

Influenza

Influenza (flu) is a viral infection of the respiratory tract. It is characterised by the sudden onset of fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and extreme fatigue. Other common symptoms include:

- a dry cough
- sore throat
- diarrhoea
- feeling nauseous and being sick

For most healthy individuals, flu is unpleasant but usually self-limiting with recovery within 2 to 7 days. It can cause more serious complications, such as bronchitis or secondary bacterial pneumonia, meningitis, and people with long-term health conditions can find that getting flu makes their condition worse. Please refer to the below links for further information on flu and managing respiratory infections in schools:

[UKHSA-Health protection in schools and other childcare facilities-Managing specific infectious diseases-Respiratory infections](#)

[NHS-Flu](#)

Flu vaccine programme 2023-24:

Children aged 2 and 3 years on 31st August 2023 and school aged children (Reception to Year 11) are eligible for the flu vaccine as part of their school's vaccination programme from September 2023.

For this upcoming flu vaccine programme, the government have said that the school-age programme should be completed ***no later than 15th December 2023***. In view of this, providers have been asked to ensure that they commence vaccinations as early as possible after the flu vaccine becomes available ***to complete all school flu vaccine clinics by this date***. This is with the aim of providing early protection, reducing transmission to the wider population, and to ensure minimal impact on routine immunisations in the spring as outlined in the below guidance:

[Government publications national flu immunisation programme 2023/24](#)

[UKHSA Flu vaccination programme 2023 to 2024:briefing for primary schools](#)

Types of flu vaccine:

The live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) given nasally is the vaccine of choice for the childhood flu programme for those aged 2 years and over, and it is safe and effective.

The injectable flu vaccine will also be available to be given in school, and there will be a link on the electronic consent form for parents to access a consent form for this if this is their vaccine of preference. An example is parents objecting to LAIV due to its porcine gelatine content (a substance derived from pigs used in vaccines as a stabiliser which ensures they remain safe and effective during storage). The injectable flu vaccine is also safe and effective.

Electronic consent forms with information on the flu vaccination will be sent out to parents and guardians ahead of school clinics.

Vaccination UK provide the school immunisation service for Dudley. The team can be contacted via dudley@v-uk.co.uk or 01384 431712.

Ways that schools can support the flu vaccination programme include:

- provide class lists with contact details to the school aged immunisation service
- encouraging and reminding parents, carers and guardians of timely completion and return of flu vaccine consent forms (including if they are declining the flu vaccine for their child/children). This will help to ensure that those children whose parents wish them to receive the flu vaccine this year have a completed consent form ahead of their school flu vaccine clinic
- sending reminders through the usual channels such as email or text distribution lists, parent newsletters
- letting parents know which day vaccination will take place in the school

Benefits of having the flu vaccine:

Children can catch and spread flu easily. Having the flu vaccine will help to reduce the number of school days missed during the winter due to illness and reduces the burden on the NHS due to people falling ill with flu. Any child who catches flu after vaccination is less likely to be seriously ill or require hospital admission.

Side effects of the flu vaccine are mild and can include a runny or blocked nose, a headache, tiredness, loss of appetite. These do not usually last long (usually 1 or 2 days).

School staff aged 65 years or older, or with certain medical conditions that put them at risk from flu, or who are pregnant, are eligible for free flu vaccination through the NHS and should contact their GP practice or pharmacy.

Please also see the below that might be useful for promoting the flu vaccine in school:
[UKHSA leaflet-Protecting your child against flu-information for parents and carers](#)

[UKHSA leaflet-Protect yourself against flu-information for those in secondary school](#)

[UKHSA-Flu-5 reasons poster-primary](#)

[UKHSA-Flu-5 reasons to vaccinate your child-secondary schools poster](#)

Measles Update for Schools

What is measles?

Measles is a viral infection that is highly infectious. It is spread through the air via droplet spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or through direct contact with nasal or throat secretions.

Measles symptoms include cold-like symptoms, such as a high temperature, runny nose, sneezing, a cough, and red, watery eyes. There is onset of a rash a few days later (see images below). The rash may be harder to see on brown and black skin. Some people may also get small spots in their mouth. People usually start to feel better in about a week.



Measles can be serious, and can lead to ear and chest infections, blindness, meningitis, and seizures.

Anyone with suspected measles should inform their GP surgery before attending an appointment which might be preferably done over the phone to reduce the spread of possible infection to others. Advice can also be obtained by calling NHS 111 or [get help from 111 online](#).

See [NHS conditions-measles](#) and [Dudley Lets get-common childhood infections-measles](#) for further information.

Measles in schools and educational settings-what you need to do:

Exclude the infected individual from the setting until 4 days after the onset of the rash (where the date of the rash onset is day 0).

You should contact your local health protection team:

They will provide advice on management of any suspected/confirmed measles cases, and if any further action is required:

Dudley Council Health Protection Team via communicable.disease@dudley.gov.uk
Mon-Fri 8.30am-4.30pm

Or

UKHSA (West Midlands) via 0344 225 3560 available 7 days a week

Individuals with a weak immune system, pregnant staff (if they are unsure of their immunity, that is have not had either measles or 2 measles vaccines) and children under 12 months who come into contact with measles are advised to seek prompt medical advice. When contacting the GP or midwife they should inform them that there has been exposure to a case of measles.

Please refer to the below for further information:

[**UKHSA Health Protection in Schools and Other Childcare Facilities-managing specific infectious diseases-measles**](#)

How to reduce the risk of spreading or catching measles:

The below measures are good infection prevention and control measures to be followed to reduce the risk of the spread of any infection in settings:

- Encourage regular and effective hand hygiene using liquid soap, warm water, and disposable paper towels.
- Promote good respiratory hygiene which includes using tissues to cover the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, disposing of used tissues in the bin straight after use, and cleaning hands after contact with respiratory secretions and contaminated objects and materials.
- Regularly clean surfaces that people touch a lot, such as door handles, work surfaces, shared items such as toys, and toilet flushes.

- Keep occupied spaces well ventilated wherever possible to let fresh air in. During the colder months, windows could be opened when rooms are unoccupied for a period of time before and after use.

Get vaccinated against measles:

The best protection against measles is the MMR vaccine which is safe and effective. It's a combined vaccine which protects against three serious illnesses: measles, mumps and rubella. In addition to protecting those having it, the vaccine also limits the chances of the virus spreading more widely, for example to children who are too young to have the vaccine and to adults who may be more vulnerable to the disease. Children should receive two doses of MMR for maximum protection.

Encourage all children and young people over the age of one year old to have the combined MMR vaccination as per the [national immunisation schedule](#). The recommended ages to have the MMR vaccine are aged between 12 and 13 months of age and again at 3 years and 4 months. However, if children aren't vaccinated at these ages, they can be vaccinated at any age with 2 doses one month apart.

Any staff who are unvaccinated or partially vaccinated with the MMR vaccination should be encouraged to seek advice from their general practitioner or practice nurse.

[Let's Get-vaccinations-in-babies-and-the-under-5s](#)
[Let's Get-missed vaccinations](#)

Finally.....

A reminder that the health protection team are available Monday to Friday 8.30am-4.30pm via communicable.disease@dudley.gov.uk if you have any queries, issues or concerns about incidence of infection in your early years, school or childcare setting. Please do not hesitate to get in touch for advice and support and a member of the team will be happy to assist.