



PRESS RELEASE

No:250/2008

Date: 22nd October 2008

MEASLES OUTBREAK IN GIBRALTAR

During the last 10 weeks, Gibraltar has experienced an outbreak of measles. We have so far been notified of over 250 cases and notifications are still coming in at around 4-6 cases per day. It is believed that the actual numbers are greater as many people with mild attacks have chosen not to report them.

While the majority of infections in the outbreak have been mild, some have been severe and a few patients including babies have needed Intensive Care. Measles is an unpleasant disease with fever, sore throat, streaming eyes, diarrhoea and rash. Most people recover within a week or so, but complications like fits, bacterial infection or pneumonia can develop. Long term complications can also arise in very young children.

It is important that all persons with symptoms suggestive of measles should report the illness to their doctor to enable complications to be detected at an early stage. In addition to medical advice, persons with the illness should follow general hygiene practices such as limiting contact with other people, carefully discarding soiled tissues and washing their hands.

Anyone who has had measles infection is immune for life and cannot get measles again. There is no basis for the rumour that some people have had measles twice. It is possible that infection with rubella ("German measles", a different disease) may have caused the confusion.

Vaccination with the MMR vaccine is the only way to prevent measles infection. All the 250 cases so far have been in persons who are unvaccinated or partly vaccinated (one dose only). Not a single case has occurred in a person who has had a full course of MMR vaccine. MMR vaccine has been available free to children on Gibraltar's health service since 1989, although the boosters were only introduced in 2002.

The MMR vaccine has additional advantages, in that it protects against Rubella (important for future mothers, to prevent babies being born with certain birth defects) and Mumps (can cause infertility in boys). It is also a very safe and effective vaccine, with an impressive track record.

Gibraltar Health Authority is continuing to advise all parents of children who have not had the MMR vaccine to immunise their children. There had been some difficulties in obtaining vaccine recently due to an international shortage, but fresh supplies have now been received.

The course consists of two injections, approximately three months apart. Please note that BOTH the doses are needed for adequate immunity. If your child has received only one dose, either now or in the past, he or she could still be at risk. Arrangements have been made to offer additional vaccination to all unimmunised children as follows:

During October and November, the Child Welfare Clinics (Primary Care Centre) will be open on Mondays (2:00pm to 4:00 pm), Wednesdays (9:00am to 11:00 am) and Fridays (9:00 to 11:00 AM) for immunisations. Appointments are not necessary.

For further information, please contact the Child Welfare department at the Primary Care Centre (tel: 20072945) or your doctor.

Public information is also available on the UK website www.immunisation.nhs.uk.