

Measles, mumps and rubella

Immunisation information

The National Immunisation Program Schedule provides free measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine to children at 12 months and four years of age. People who were born during or since 1966, who have not received a measles containing vaccine, should also consider vaccination.

Measles

Measles is a serious and highly contagious viral disease which causes fever, runny nose, cough and sore red eyes, followed by a rash. Measles can sometimes lead to dangerous complications such as pneumonia. About one person in 2,000 who contracts measles will develop inflammation of the brain.

For every 10 people who become affected in this way, one will die and four will have permanent brain damage. Measles still causes deaths in Australia. A rare condition called SSPE can develop several years after a measles infection. SSPE rapidly destroys the brain and is always fatal.

Measles can be caught through coughs and sneezes from an infected person before that person realises they are sick.

Mumps

Mumps causes fever, headache and inflammation of the salivary glands. Occasionally it causes an infection of the membrane covering the brain, but permanent side effects are rare. The disease can also cause permanent deafness.

About one in five adolescent or adult males who contracts mumps develops a painful inflammation and swelling of the testicles. Males with this condition generally recover completely, but on rare occasions it may cause infertility.

Mumps can be caught through coughs and sneezes from an infected person before that person realises they are sick.

Rubella

This is a mild childhood disease but it can also affect teenagers and adults. The disease causes swollen glands, joint pains and a rash on the face and neck which lasts two to three days. Recovery is always speedy and complete.

Rubella is most dangerous when a woman catches it in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy. This can result in serious abnormalities in the newborn baby. Deafness, blindness, heart defects and intellectual disabilities can occur.

Rubella can be caught through coughs and sneezes from an infected person before that person realises they are sick.

Rubella is highly contagious and the best way to protect expectant mothers and their babies is to ensure that women are immunised before they become pregnant.

*Pregnancy should be avoided for one month following immunisation.

Measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) immunisation

The MMR vaccine brand currently available is Priorix®. Priorix® vaccine contains small amounts of each of the viruses at a reduced strength and a small amount of the antibiotic, neomycin. It is stabilised with a small amount of preservative.

Who should be immunised?

The vaccine protects children against all three diseases and is given at 12 months of age. A booster dose of the vaccine is given at four years of age.

All people born during or since 1966 should check their immunisation status to ensure they have had two doses of a measles containing vaccine. If people in this age group do not have documentation (either written or by a blood test showing immunity) of two measles containing vaccines, they should discuss having the MMR vaccine with their immunisation provider.

Women of child bearing age, especially those considering pregnancy, should see their doctor and have a blood test for rubella. The blood test will show if another MMR immunisation is needed. If you do require another MMR immunisation, a further blood test should be done after immunisation to ensure that the vaccine has provided protection. Women should not have the vaccine if they are already pregnant or might become pregnant within one month. It is important that women have a rubella blood test before each pregnancy to check that the level of protection is still adequate.

Possible side effects of MMR vaccine

Reactions to MMR vaccine are much less frequent than the complications of the diseases.

Common side effects

Seen five to 12 days after vaccination

- High fever over 39°C
- Faint red rash (not infectious)
- Head cold and/or runny nose
- Cough and/or puffy eyes
- Drowsiness or tiredness
- Swelling of the salivary glands
- A temporary small lump at the injection site

Serious side effects

- Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) at a rate of one in one million
- Thrombocytopenia (bruising or bleeding) at a rate of one in 30,500 doses

Extremely rare side effect

- Severe allergic reaction

If mild reactions do occur, they may last two to three days. The side effects can be reduced by:

- Drinking extra fluids
- Not overdressing
- Placing a cold wet cloth on the sore injection site
- Taking (or giving your child) paracetamol to reduce any discomfort (note the recommended dose for the age of your child)

If reactions are severe or persistent, or if you are worried, contact your doctor or hospital.

Pre-immunisation checklist

Before you or your child is immunised, tell the doctor or nurse if any of the following apply:

- Have had a vaccine containing live viruses within the last month (such as chickenpox or BCG)
- Are unwell on the day of immunisation (temperature over 38.5°C)
- Have had a severe reaction to a previous MMR vaccine
- Have had a severe allergy to any vaccine component eg. neomycin
- Are taking steroids of any sort other than inhaled asthma sprays or steroid creams (for example, cortisone or prednisone)
- Have had immunoglobulin or a blood product in the past year
- Have a disease or are having treatment which causes low immunity (for example, leukaemia, cancer, HIV/AIDS, radiotherapy or chemotherapy)
- Are pregnant or planning to become pregnant within one month of immunisation (and are actually receiving the vaccine)

The following websites offer resources and further information

www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation

www.immunise.health.gov.au



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