

RCEM Position Statement Measles

March 2024

It has been widely reported that the confirmed incidence of measles has significantly increased in the UK. In January 2023 there were 12 cases, and this has increased to 157 UK cases in December 2023. There is regional variation in measles cases with most cases being detected in London and the West Midlands. Other areas have reported cases and there have been outbreaks in Europe and Africa, meaning that imported cases are possible. Measles is a preventable disease if most of the population receive two doses of the MMR vaccine. Measles is highly infectious with 15-20 people being infected from a single case in an un-vaccinated population.

RCEM believes that its members have an important role to play in the diagnosis, and notification of public health teams. There is also an important role in supporting and educating patients and their families when they are seen in the ED. RCEM acknowledges that measles can be a difficult clinical diagnosis to make for those who have not seen it before. RCEM would encourage all ED clinicians to ensure they are familiar with the clinical features and the complications of measles. If a case is suspected, then this should be notified to the relevant public health team. This not only allows surveillance, but also contact tracing and post exposure prophylaxis for vulnerable contacts such as pregnant women.

We recommend that clinicians working in emergency departments should ensure that they are fully vaccinated. This will ensure the best protection for patients, families, and individuals. The measles vaccine was introduced in the UK in 1968 but uptake was low until it changed to MMR vaccine in 1988. In November 1994, a large campaign with measles-rubella vaccine was offered to everyone at school (those aged 5-16 years), and a second dose of MMR was then introduced at pre-school age in 1996. Other countries introduced measles and MMR vaccines at different times. Satisfactory evidence of protection includes documentation of two doses of MMR vaccine or a positive antibody test for both measles and rubella. This should be available in your occupational health department. Anyone born in the UK before 1970 is likely to have had measles as a child. You can check whether you had your childhood vaccines with your GP, and if not, you can receive MMR vaccination on the NHS. If you are not sure, you can still have MMR vaccination. The rate of side effects is lower with second (and subsequent) doses and so it is not harmful to have an extra dose.

Careful consideration should be given to processes at triage to attempt to minimise contact of a potential measles case with others in the ED. These processes will be dependent on the layout of individual departments. Liaison with infection control colleagues will be of assistance in this process.

In the case of a measles index case leading to potential exposure to others in the ED, then public health teams would normally be expected to take a lead role in contact tracing and managing the public health components in this event.

Front line ED clinicians can detect when patients have not been vaccinated. They are also well placed to give information about vaccination and encourage patients and their families to achieve full vaccination as the best way to prevent measles. RCEM would encourage clinicians to do this.

RCEM would encourage un-vaccinated patients or families with un-vaccinated children to receive the MMR vaccine as this is the best way to prevent measles and the potential serious complications of measles. The best way to do this is to contact their GP surgery.

RCEM Paediatric Emergency Medicine – Professional Advisory Group

Further information

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/measles-epidemiology-2023/confirmed-cases-of-measles-in-england-by-month-age-and-region-2023>

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65a7a806867cd800135ae9bb/national-measles-guidelines-january-2024.pdf>

<https://www.rcemlearning.co.uk/foamed/measles/>

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZawwKSBCI6NMKi-sUJ4fTqnmhjzJRtTf/view?usp=drive_link

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vvL5uS9ZwVf0ei6ESB4tQQhEBI2la81K/view?usp=drive_link