



19th September 2024

Re: Health protection updates for the new term

Dear head teachers/early years leaders,

With the new school term starting, we would like to update you on some important health protection issues that we are closely monitoring with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA). It's important to keep you informed about the latest updates and guidance.

We have enclosed a letter for parents and guardians with some tips on how to keep their children healthy over the coming autumn/winter season. We would be grateful if you would send this to your parents/carers. Please also see the latest blog from the Department of Education on how to keep children healthy in school:

<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/08/28/top-tips-how-child-healthy-school/>

Measles and whooping cough (pertussis):

National outbreaks of measles and whooping cough are ongoing with cases reported across the UK, including in the East of England. Although the summer break has helped slow the spread, routine vaccination coverage, especially two doses of the MMR vaccine, remains below the level needed to prevent outbreaks in Central Bedfordshire.

Please continue encouraging parents/carers to vaccinate their children with both doses of the MMR. If any cases are suspected in your setting, please follow the Health Protection in Schools and Other Childcare Facilities guidance. FAQs previously circulated are also included with this letter.

Measles: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities/managing-specific-infectious-diseases-a-to-z#measles>

Whooping cough: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities/managing-specific-infectious-diseases-a-to-z#whooping-cough-pertussis>

Flu:

Flu season preparations are underway. The flu vaccine is being offered to most children from age 2 to 16 (school year 11), as well as to children with certain health conditions.

Children aged 2-3 years old or with certain health conditions can get the flu vaccine at their GP practice and parents/carers should be receiving their invitations shortly.

For school-age children, if you haven't already, the community and school aged immunisations service (CSAIS) will be in touch with you very soon to start arranging flu clinics. There has been a change in provider for this year and the flu clinics in Central Bedfordshire will be provided by Vaccination UK. Please encourage parents to get the consent forms completed and returned, in order for their child to have the vaccine this year.

Mpox:

There has been recent news coverage about a new strain of Mpox (clade 1b), which is affecting the Democratic Republic of Congo and surrounding countries. The UKHSA is closely monitoring this situation, and while there are currently no cases of this strain in the UK, we want to ensure you are aware of the latest guidance. The risk remains low in the UK at present

Mpox: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities/managing-specific-infectious-diseases-a-to-z#mpox--monkeypox>

In line with the response to measles, please be assured that if any mpox cases are diagnosed in the UK and they have attended a school or a childcare setting, the UKHSA will immediately contact the setting with further advice.

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact us at healthprotection@bedford.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Vicky Head

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Measles Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What are the signs of measles?

Measles is a highly infectious condition that can be a serious illness and in rare cases can be fatal; the first signs of measles are:

High temperature	Runny or blocked nose	Sneezing
Red, sore, watery eyes	Coughing	Aching, feeling generally unwell

A blotchy red brown rash usually appears a few days after initial symptoms, note that this can be harder to see on black or brown skin.

More information about measles: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/measles/>

Q: What should I do if I think a child has measles?

Follow your usual procedure for children who fall ill at school or at your setting. Keep them separated from other children and staff members (as far as is practical and safe for the child) and call the parents/guardians to collect them as soon as possible. Advise the parents to isolate the child at home and call their GP or NHS 111 initially to get the child assessed. If measles is suspected the GP will support the parent in a clinically safe way to avoid transmission to others.

Initial contact with health services should be over the phone (or 999 in a life-threatening emergency).

Q: What should I do if I think a staff member has measles?

Advise the staff member to go home (avoiding public transport and contact with others) and call their GP or NHS 111 initially for an assessment. If measles is suspected the GP will support the staff member in a clinically safe way to avoid transmission to others.

Initial contact with health services should be over the phone (or 999 in a life-threatening emergency).

Q: A parent has told me that their child has measles, what should I do?

Ask the parent if they have been in contact with their GP or NHS 111 and measles has been diagnosed by a doctor. Ask the parent if the doctor has notified the case to the UKHSA (they may not know this but if they are able to check with the GP, this will be helpful).

If you are not already aware, it may be helpful to establish if the child has had their MMR vaccinations. In most cases, if a child is vaccinated, it is unlikely the child will have measles, which may provide some reassurance.

At this stage there is no need to inform other parents. If the case has been notified to the UKHSA, you will be advised by UKHSA if the case is confirmed and what to do next. In areas where measles is not circulating and there is high vaccine coverage, most suspected cases of measles that are notified do not turn out to be measles.

Q: Are children who have only received their first dose of MMR at risk from catching measles? Should they stay away from others or early years settings until they have had two doses?

One dose of MMR gives a high level of individual protection from measles. It is fine for children to wait to have the second dose when it is due and continue with their usual activities. There is no need to keep children out of childcare or schools before they have had their second dose. As well as providing full protection for the child, the purpose of two doses of MMR prevents measles spreading to those who cannot have the vaccine (this is called providing herd immunity and occurs when over 95% of the population has received two doses of MMR).

Should a positive case be reported in a childcare or school setting, the UKHSA will advise on any further actions required.