

MIMR

key facts

for parliamentary candidates

The national
deafblind and rubella association



sense
TOUCHING PEOPLE'S LIVES

As a candidate in the General Election, you are likely to be asked if you support single vaccines as an alternative to the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination.

Sense has prepared this guide so that you can be armed with the key facts about MMR, and why it is so important that parents continue to support its use.

- **MMR is effective in protecting against dangerous diseases.**

More than half the public wrongly believe that medical science is evenly divided about the safety of MMR.¹ This is not the case. Politicians have a responsibility to ensure that they are not adding to the fear and emotion surrounding this issue.

- **Medical evidence overwhelmingly points to MMR as being both safe and effective.**

the effects of rubella

If a woman catches rubella in early pregnancy it can be passed on to the foetus, causing damage to the eyes, ears, heart, brain and nervous system.

Thanks to vaccination, rubella damage is now rare. However, this means that many people do not realise how dangerous rubella can be, and why vaccination is so important.

- **Rubella causes blindness, deafness and brain damage.**

measles and mumps

Measles and mumps are very unpleasant diseases. Measles can kill, and mumps can cause viral meningitis and lasting damage to hearing.

MMR – an enormous success

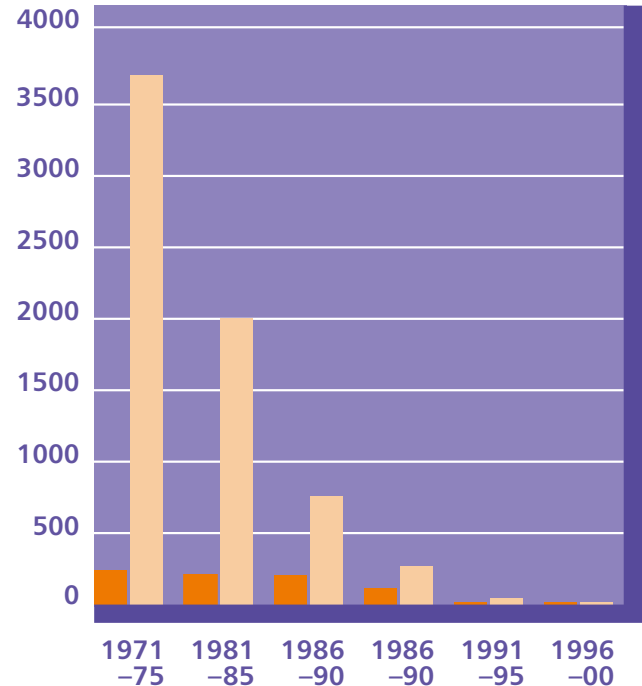
From 1970, schoolgirls were vaccinated against rubella.

This was only partly successful in reducing the number of rubella births, since the virus was still widely circulating in the community.

The real breakthrough came in 1988 when MMR was introduced for all children.

- **MMR reduced rubella births by 90%** (there were 373 between 1971–1980 and 38 between 1991–2000)²

rubella births and associated terminations of pregnancy



2 SOURCE: NATIONAL CONGENITAL RUBELLA SURVEILLANCE PROGRAMME

why not single vaccines?

Single vaccines would be less effective than MMR and there is no evidence that they would be safer.

It is unethical to promote six invasive procedures instead of two without sound scientific support, and when there is evidence that such a strategy would have negative effects.

some problems associated with single jabs:

■ delays

These are an inescapable part of a single vaccine strategy. More children would be left unprotected for longer, with more opportunity for dangerous diseases to spread.

■ missed appointments

Nearly 13 million GP and practice nurse appointments are missed every year.³

Single vaccines require six appointments instead of two: this would be bound to cause more missed appointments and reduced protection against disease.

■ not taking up rubella vaccination

Parents may opt not to vaccinate their children, particularly their sons, against rubella.

This would lead to increased risk to pregnant women.

Unvaccinated boys can catch rubella and go on to infect pregnant women, including their own mothers.

what happens when single vaccines are offered?

In the 1970s, following a decrease in uptake of the diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTP) vaccine, single vaccines for pertussis (whooping cough) were offered, with DT given separately.

What happened was that over half of parents chose to vaccinate their children without the pertussis component.

Coverage fell from 80% to 30%, there were three epidemics of whooping cough and thousands of hospital admissions.

It took nearly fifteen years for vaccine uptake levels to recover.

- **Offering single vaccines would reduce confidence in the vaccination programme, putting people at risk.**

to sum up

- 1 Rubella can have devastating consequences, but it is a preventable disease.
 - 2 MMR has had worldwide success in preventing measles, mumps and rubella.
 - 3 In the UK, MMR has virtually eliminated circulation of rubella and has dramatically reduced the number of rubella births.
- **The World Health Organisation recognises MMR as a highly effective vaccine with an outstanding safety record. It would be irresponsible to support anything else.**

about Sense

Sense was established in 1955 by the parents of children with rubella damage. It is a national organisation providing services, advice and support to deafblind people.

for more information, please contact:

**Katie Hanson, Parliamentary Officer
Sense**

11–13 Clifton Terrace, London N4 3SR

telephone 020 7561 3404

textphone 020 7561 3404

katie.hanson@sense.org.uk

www.sense.org.uk

in Scotland

**Linda Long
Sense Scotland**

43 Middlesex Street, Glasgow G41 1EE

telephone 0141 429 0294

textphone 0141 418 7170

info@sensescotland.org.uk

in Northern Ireland

**Colette Gray
Sense Northern Ireland
The Manor House**

51 Mallusk Road, Mallusk BT36 4RU

telephone 028 9083 3430

textphone 028 9083 3430

colette.gray@sense.org.uk

in Wales

**Sense Cymru
5 Raleigh Walk, Brigantine Place
Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff CF10 4LN**

telephone 029 2045 7641

textphone 029 2046 4125

enquiries@sensecymru.org.uk

in one minute or less

- Medical evidence overwhelmingly points to MMR as being both safe and effective
- The World Health Organisation recognises MMR as a highly effective vaccine with an outstanding safety record.
- In view of the evidence, it would be irresponsible to support anything else.