

Benefits and risks of MMR

Prior to MMR there was no vaccination programme against mumps and it was the most common cause of viral meningitis and resulted in hearing impairments for many. It is only in recent years, with the drop in vaccination rates that we have seen mumps return.

Measles is a killer. In 1987, 17 children died of measles. There was then a gap of 19 years. Recently there have been outbreaks of measles and in 2006 a young boy who was unable to be vaccinated because of a suppressed immune system, caught the disease and died.

If a mother catches rubella when she is pregnant she can pass on the infection to her unborn child who may be badly damaged as a result.

The risks of vaccination

The information in this section is taken from official sources – NHS literature and websites. Your doctor will be able to answer in detail questions you have about the vaccine.

“MMR is a highly effective vaccine which has an outstanding safety record” – the World Health Organisation.

There are very few people who can't be immunised with MMR. Some of those who can't be immunised include:

- those whose immune system is suppressed
- pregnant women
- children who are very ill
- someone who has had a severe reaction to MMR previously
- someone who has reacted to neomycin or kanamycin in the past.

Many people believe you can't have the MMR if you are allergic to egg. A number of studies have looked at patients with egg allergies who received the MMR vaccine and these have found no cause for concern, so children with egg allergy can have the MMR jab. You should talk to your Doctor if you have any concerns about this.

Mild symptoms of the disease can occur – this is because the body is reacting to the immunisation and creating the antibodies needed to protect against the disease. The NHS Direct website has some useful information on [NHS Choices: MMR vaccine](#) and [NHS Choices: vaccination planner](#).

Children cannot infect other children with the viruses after an immunisation.

All medicines can cause side effects and because MMR contains live viruses, in theory, it is possible for them to cause illnesses that are linked to the natural diseases (for example encephalitis and bleeding disorders are, rarely, linked to rubella). If this does happen the illnesses will be milder and occur less often than if the person had caught the wild disease.

The fact that all medicines can cause side effects is an argument against single vaccines for measles, mumps and rubella because this triples the number of medicines received.

Around the world millions of doses of MMR have been given to children so we know a lot about what happens to children after they have been vaccinated. The NHS has [factsheets](#) that give more details about this.

Does the triple vaccine overload the immune system in any way?

Sense is not aware of any evidence to support the idea that the immune system is overloaded in anyway. In fact there is evidence to show that babies could respond to many vaccines at any one time, and that only a tiny percentage of a child's immune system is used up for each vaccine.

A paper in the journal 'Pediatrics' published in 2002, concluded that:

'On the contrary, young infants have an enormous capacity to respond to multiple vaccines, as well as to the many other challenges present in the environment. By providing protection against a number of bacterial and viral pathogens, vaccines prevent the 'weakening' of the immune system and consequent secondary bacterial infections occasionally caused by natural infection.'

The following points are useful to remember in the debate about overloading the immune system:

- The different components of the MMR vaccine affect the child at different times, due to the different incubation period for each disease
- Improvements in vaccine design mean that even though children today receive more vaccines than they did in the past, they receive fewer antigens (the bit of the vaccine that stimulates an immune response in the child)

A child will come across many things during a day that could cause an infection – their immune system is designed to cope with many of these occurring at the same time.