

## Single vaccines

In recent years many have argued that the NHS should have single vaccines available to protect against the three diseases: measles, mumps and rubella. Many parents have understandably looked at single vaccines as an alternative to MMR given the concern there has been about the vaccine. Parents have faced difficult choices in deciding the best way to protect their children.

However, Sense would be very critical of any decision to introduce single vaccines on the NHS. Sense does not believe the NHS should offer second best, nor should it give a choice to families that it does not believe will be effective.

There is no evidence to support the suggestion that allowing single vaccines would lead to a greater uptake of MMR, and a real possibility that it would have the opposite effect. Single vaccines would be less effective than MMR and there is no evidence that they would be safer. Dr Wakefield has never ruled out the single measles jab from his discredited theory.

Sense believes that 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. Problems associated with single jabs include:

- Delays - these would be 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 - over 11 million GP and over 5 million practice nurse appointments are missed every year.<sup>1</sup> Single vaccines would 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. This is exactly what happened before MMR was introduced.

Lastly, offering single vaccines could reduce confidence in the vaccination programme, which could lead to reduced uptake, putting more people at risk.

Given that there is no evidence that single vaccines have any advantages over combined vaccines and plenty of evidence of the risks, Sense believes that it would be a mistake to offer them.

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<sup>1</sup> Developing Patient Partnerships (DPP) and the Institute of Healthcare Management (2006)