

Measles, mumps and rubella

Immunisation information

The National Immunisation Program schedule provides free measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine to children at 12 months and 18 months of age.

Measles

Measles is a serious and highly contagious viral disease which causes fever, runny nose, cough and sore red eyes, followed by a rash. Measles can sometimes lead to dangerous complications such as pneumonia. About one person in 1,000 who contracts measles will develop inflammation of the brain. For every 10 children who become affected in this way, one will die and many will have permanent brain damage. Measles still causes deaths in Australia. A rare condition called SSPE can develop several years after a measles infection. SSPE rapidly destroys the brain and is always fatal.

Measles can be caught through coughs and sneezes from an infected person before that person realises they are sick.

Mumps

Mumps causes fever, headache and inflammation of the salivary glands. About one in 5,000 children develops inflammation of the brain. The disease can cause permanent deafness.

About one in five adolescent or adult males who contracts mumps develops a painful inflammation and swelling of the testicles. Males with this condition generally recover completely, but on rare occasions it may cause infertility.

Mumps can be caught through coughs and sneezes from an infected person before that person realises they are sick.

Rubella

This is a mild childhood disease but it can also affect teenagers and adults. The disease causes swollen glands, joint pains and a rash on the face and neck which lasts two to three days. Recovery is always speedy and complete.

Rubella is most dangerous when a woman catches it in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy. This can result in serious abnormalities in the newborn baby. Deafness, blindness, heart defects and intellectual disabilities can occur.

Rubella can be caught through coughs and sneezes from an infected person before that person realises they are sick.

Rubella is highly contagious and the best way to protect expectant mothers and their babies is to ensure that women are immunised before they become pregnant.

*Pregnancy should be avoided for one month following immunisation.

Measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccines

The MMR vaccine also comes in combination with chickenpox (MMRV) for 18-month-old children and contains small amounts of each of the viruses at a reduced strength and a small amount of the antibiotic neomycin.

Possible side effects of MMR vaccine

Reactions to MMR vaccine are much less frequent than the complications of the diseases.

Common side effects

Seen seven to 10 days after vaccination

- high fever over 39 °C
- faint red rash (not infectious)
- head cold and/or runny nose
- cough and/or puffy eyes
- drowsiness or tiredness
- swelling of the salivary glands
- a temporary small lump at the injection site.

Serious side effects

- Low platelet count (causing bruising or bleeding) occurs after the first dose of MMR vaccine at a rate of about one in 20,000 to 30,000.

Extremely rare side effects

- A severe allergic reaction.

If mild reactions do occur, they may last two to three days. The side effects can be reduced by:

- placing a cold wet cloth on the sore injection site
- giving extra fluids and not overdressing if the person has a fever
- taking (or giving your child) paracetamol to reduce discomfort (note the recommended dose for the age of your child).

If reactions are severe or persistent, or if you are worried, contact your doctor or hospital.

You may also call the Victorian vaccine safety service on 1300 882 924 option 1.

Pre-immunisation checklist

Before you or your child is immunised, tell the doctor or nurse if any of the following apply.

- Has had a vaccine containing live viruses within the last month (such as MMR, chickenpox or BCG)
- Is unwell on the day of immunisation (temperature over 38.5 °C)
- Has had a severe reaction to a previous MMR vaccine
- Has had a severe allergy to any vaccine component for example, neomycin
- Is taking steroids of any sort other than inhaled asthma sprays or steroid creams (for example, cortisone or prednisone)
- Has had immunoglobulin or a blood product in the past year
- Has a disease or is having treatment which causes low immunity (for example, leukaemia, cancer, HIV/AIDS, radiotherapy or chemotherapy)
- Is pregnant or planning to become pregnant within one month of immunisation

Further information

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

www.immunise.health.gov.au



**Translating and
interpreting service**
Call 131 450

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