

County Council Meeting – 8th February 2024

**Question to Councillor Mark Sutton
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

By Councillor Pardesi

Question

What are the MMR vaccination rates within Staffordshire? Have they declined in recent years? Are there any concerns about the increased incidence of measles among Staffordshire children?

Reply

As you probably know, the MMR vaccine is delivered as part of the routine childhood immunisation schedule. It is delivered in 2 doses: 1st dose at around 12 months, and 2nd dose around 3yrs 4 months (up to 5 yrs). One dose offers around 95% protection and 2 doses around 99% protection. Our uptake for dose one is pretty good, but we start to see this tail-off by the 2nd dose. (This trend is not specific to Staffordshire and in fact, coverage for MMR vaccine in the UK has fallen to its lowest level in a decade).

Staffordshire MMR coverage

Immunisation	Staffordshire 2022/23	Staffordshire 2021/22	Staffordshire 2020/21	West Midlands (22/23)	England (22/23)
MMR1 (1 st dose)	93.6%	93.8%	93.9%	88.9%	89.3%
MMR2 (2 nd dose)	89.3%	90.4%	90.6%	83.7%	84.5%

Coverage for MMR vaccine in Staffordshire is pretty good overall – above the regional and national average. The latest full year data we have is for 2022-23, which shows **Staffordshire coverage for MMR (2nd dose) at 89.3%** (compared to England at 84.5%). This figure has remained fairly static for a number of years (see above table). The World Health Organisation target is 95% to reach satisfactory levels of 'herd immunity'.

However, there are pockets where we have much lower uptake, particularly in specific communities and populations. This is often seen in gypsy roma traveller communities, specific ethnic minority groups, children in care and

migrant populations. We are working with the Integrated Care Board to review GP patient data and school data to identify pockets of lowest uptake across Staffordshire for targeted action.

There are also sections of our population who haven't been vaccinated for other reasons, such as children under 12 months and people who have weaker immune systems. This means we have pockets of susceptible children and adults who will be more vulnerable to catching measles and the potential for outbreaks in unvaccinated communities/populations.

Are there concerns about the increase of measles among children in Staffordshire?

During 2023 there was a resurgence of measles in England. Cases have predominantly been in Birmingham with smaller numbers in other West Midlands local authority areas. In the last few weeks, there have been a small number of confirmed cases in Staffordshire (<5). However, we do not get notified of every new case and there is a small lag in the release of this information (about a week behind). We know that measles is *the* most infectious disease that is spread through the respiratory route, therefore although every precaution is taken to minimise any further spread, it is likely we will see further cases amongst susceptible populations. We are doing what we can to minimise this risk.

Local action

Having seen the rapid increase in cases in London and the West Midlands, over the last few months we have been working with partners across the local health system to identify where we have low vaccine coverage, understand potential barriers to coming forward for vaccination, and developing targeted community-driven messaging and alternative vaccine delivery mechanisms to overcome these barriers.

For now (as cases are still relatively low in Staffordshire), our focus is on increasing MMR uptake in low coverage populations as we know this is the most effective protective factor. Vaccines are our best line of defence against diseases like measles and help stop outbreaks occurring in the community. In addition, we are taking steps to ensure the local system is as prepared and resilient as it can be if we were to see a rapid increase in cases. For example, last week we carried out a multi-agency table-top exercise with various possible scenarios to test our local measles pathways and outbreak mitigation/management arrangements.
