

## **Reducing differences in the uptake of immunisation (PH21): Frequently asked questions for staff in Sure Start Children's Centres**

This Frequently Asked Questions tool accompanies the public health guidance: 'Reducing differences in the uptake of immunisations (including targeted vaccines) among children and young people aged under 19 years' (available online at [www.nice.org.uk/PH21](http://www.nice.org.uk/PH21)).

Sure Start Children's Centres have an important role to play in encouraging parents and carers to protect their children against disease. Children's centre staff play a vital role when working with parents to point out the benefits of vaccination.

Children who are not up-to-date with vaccinations may also be behind on other government initiatives such as the Healthy Child programme activities – or may have other health needs e.g. visits to the dentist.

### **Why do children and young people need to be immunised?**

The higher the proportion of the population that is vaccinated against an infection, the lower the proportion at risk of becoming infected (and lower the chance of infection spreading within the population).

For example, an estimated 3 million children aged 18 months to 18 years may have missed either their first or second measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination. The potential exposure of so many children and young people to the measles virus means that there is risk of a large outbreak. Measles can lead to serious complications – and can even be fatal.

## **Who is most at risk of not being fully immunised?**

Children and young people most at risk of not being immunised include those:

- who are 'looked after'
- with a physical or learning disability
- with teenage or lone parents
- who are vulnerable (for example, travellers)
- from non-English speaking families and some minority ethnic groups
- who are the youngest in large families
- who are hospitalised or have a chronic illness
- who have missed previous vaccinations
- not registered with a GP
- who are homeless
- who are asylum seekers
- who take drugs.

Differences in uptake in the national childhood immunisation programme are associated with a wide range of factors. For example, vulnerable children may be at risk of missing vaccinations because they are not in contact with primary care services. Services may not be flexible enough for children from some minority ethnic groups and those whose first language is not English and information may not be provided in a language they understand. The youngest child is at risk due to the logistical difficulties associated with large families.

Many of the children and their families listed above may attend a Sure Start Children's Centre where immunisations can be promoted or provided on site

## **Why is it so important to ensure infant hepatitis B vaccinations are completed and given at the right time?**

Babies born to mothers who, when they were screened during pregnancy, were found to be infected with hepatitis B, need to receive a full course of vaccinations - at birth, at one month, two months and at twelve months. Although coverage for the birth dose of the hepatitis B vaccine appears to be high, subsequent vaccinations at one month, two months and at twelve months may be delayed or never received.

The NICE guidance focuses on the timely completion of the hepatitis B vaccination programme for infants because of the health risks to babies born to infected mothers. If they don't receive all these vaccinations at the right time they have a high risk of becoming chronically infected and can go on to develop serious liver disease such as cirrhosis and liver cancer. This can be prevented, in over 90% of cases, by appropriate vaccinations, starting at birth, of all babies born to infected mothers.

Sure Start Children's Centres can play a role in promoting the importance of timely vaccinations and completion of the full schedule of doses by publicising immunisation programmes and helping parents to contact their local GP or health visitor.

## **Is action still needed if local immunisation rates are high?**

Even where coverage appears to be high, groups of children and young people may still be at risk of acquiring vaccine-preventable infections.

Vulnerable children may be at risk of missing vaccinations because they are not in contact with primary care services.

There is some evidence that uptake of MMR has declined at a greater rate among children of more highly educated parents and among those living in more affluent areas. This bucks the general trend on immunisations among these groups.

**How can we ensure information on the benefits of immunisation is up-to-date and available in a variety of formats, so we can support parents effectively?**

- Up-to-date information in a range of languages is available from the NHS ([http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/DH\\_4123594](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/DH_4123594))
- Check with your local PCT immunisation coordinator about the variety of formats available for different local communities and groups.
- Consider running question and answer or drop-in sessions on immunisations in liaison with your Health Visitor.

**How can we encourage parents to ensure their children complete each vaccination programme?**

- If a member of the children's centre discovers that a child's vaccinations are outstanding, they could discuss these with the child's parent and see if they can be vaccinated at the children's centre, if appropriate (or they could refer them to another service).
- If your children's centre already hosts an immunisation service, perhaps it could be made more flexible, for example, by extending clinic times. Working parents often find it difficult to attend day time clinics.
- Become an outreach site for immunisation services by working with the local Healthy Child team's health visitor.

## **How can we promote timely and complete vaccination of children?**

- Find out about local services and talk to parents about how they work from the parent's viewpoint. Use any feedback locally to encourage service improvement.
- Make sure you have up-to-date information for parents and young people on the benefits of immunisation if possible, in a variety of formats.
- Give parents and young people the opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have about immunisation.
- Monitor the vaccination status of every child attending the children's centre, at every appropriate opportunity (such as when they first come along). Where appropriate, organise for them to be vaccinated at the children's centre or refer them elsewhere for vaccinations.

## **What training do staff need to be able to answer questions about immunisation in a knowledgeable and skilful manner?**

All staff involved in delivering immunisation services should be appropriately trained and their training should be regularly updated to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge. For example, they should be able to answer questions about different vaccinations and should be able to document vaccinations accurately in the correct records.

For information on training, check with your local immunisations coordinator at the PCT. Details of the national minimum standard for immunisation training are available online from

[www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb\\_C/1204100464376](http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1204100464376)

### **Is it only parents who can take a child to be vaccinated?**

No. Those with parental responsibility do not necessarily need to be present when a vaccination is given. Provided they have received information about it, they can arrange for another person (for example, a grandparent or childminder) to attend with the child.

Further information regarding consent is available in chapter two of the 'Green book' available from

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/dr\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_063591.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/dr_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_063591.pdf)

The NICE 'Reducing differences in the uptake of immunisations : Guide to resources' includes other NICE resources, case studies, vaccination schedules including those in different languages, toolkits to help audit, training materials, leaflets and factsheets.