

Summary

- Cases of measles and whooping cough are increasing in England.
- There is a decline in uptake of many vaccination programmes in England, for adults and children.
- Vaccinations play a vital role in keeping our communities protected from certain diseases.
- Vaccinations are safe and effective.
- It is never too late to catch up with missed vaccinations.
- Surrey County Council Public Health team are working in partnership with NHS England (who commission vaccination programmes), vaccination provider services, Surrey Heartlands ICB, educational settings and local communities to promote and improve the uptake of all vaccinations and help tackle health inequalities.
- Families can also find out more information about local immunisation services for those aged 3 years and 6 months to 19 years old at [Immunisations :: Children and Family Health Surrey \(childrenshealthsurrey.nhs.uk\)](https://childrenshealthsurrey.nhs.uk), including how to contact their local immunisation team.

Whooping cough (pertussis)

Whooping cough cases have been rising across England, as well as in many other countries, since December 2023. People of all ages and across all parts of the country have been infected. Whooping cough is a cyclical disease that peaks every 3 to 5 years. The last cyclical increase occurred in 2016. However, in common with other diseases, cases fell to very low numbers during the pandemic due to restrictions and public behaviours. A peak year is therefore overdue, and the impact of the pandemic also means there is reduced immunity in the population.

Whooping cough, clinically known as pertussis, is a bacterial infection of the lungs and airways. It spreads very easily through coughing and sneezing and can cause very serious illness, especially in young babies.

Babies who are too young to start their vaccinations are at greatest risk. Young babies with whooping cough often become very unwell and most will be admitted to hospital. When whooping cough is particularly severe, they can die.

There were 181 cases of whooping cough in infants under 3 months old between January and April 2024 in England. Tragically, 8 of these babies died.

Maternal vaccination is key to protecting mothers and babies against whooping cough. It is safe and extremely effective. Babies receive 'passive' protection as the antibodies made when pregnant women are vaccinated cross the placenta. This lasts until the baby can receive direct protection from their first vaccinations at 8 weeks old. The vaccine also prevents mothers getting the illness and being a source of infection for their baby in its first weeks of life.

The uptake of the vaccine in pregnancy has fallen in recent years. There are gaps in understanding about the importance of vaccination in pregnancy, as well as concerns about safety and a low perceived risk of serious disease. Accessing vaccines can be a problem for some people

Call to action

Anyone who is pregnant is eligible for the vaccine, please discuss this with your midwife or GP practice early in pregnancy, they will be able to answer any concerns you may have.

All babies are eligible for the vaccine through the routine childhood vaccination programme, which provides protection against many vaccine preventable diseases. Please ensure they attend all appointments offered or speak to your practice if you need to rearrange these.

Vaccination programme	When	How
<p>1. Maternal vaccination programme</p> <p>Around 90% effective in preventing whooping cough and hospital admissions in young babies</p> <p>Over 90% effective at preventing infant deaths.</p>	<p>From as early as 16 weeks.</p> <p>For best protection give before 32 weeks.</p> <p>Can be given up until labour</p> <p><u>It is important to be vaccinated with every pregnancy.</u></p>	<p>Midwives at antenatal clinics (not all hospitals offer this)</p> <p>Appointment with GP</p> <p>Contact midwife or GP if reached week 20 of pregnancy and are unsure whether they have had the vaccine.</p>
<p>2. Infant vaccination programme</p> <p>Routine childhood vaccinations programme</p>	<p>At 8, 12 and 16 weeks of age as part of the routine childhood vaccination schedule, plus;</p> <p>A pre-school booster at age 3 years and 4 months .</p>	<p>GP practices.</p> <p>Anyone who has missed a vaccine is encouraged to contact their GP practice to 'catch up'.</p>

Measles

Since 2022, measles activity has been increasing globally, with large outbreaks ongoing in multiple countries across South Asia and Africa. Since October 2023, there has been a rise in measles cases across England (more than 2000 people have been infected), including most recently London, which causes additional risks to neighbouring areas such as Surrey. Most of the cases have been in children aged 10 years old and younger, although 30% have been in teenagers and adults aged 15 years and older.

The uptake of the Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccination programme in the UK has fallen to the lowest level in a decade. Latest published data for Surrey shows that, although uptake for the MMR vaccine has improved, it remains well below the 95% target set by the World Health Organization (WHO) which is necessary to prevent outbreaks and can also help to eliminate measles disease.

Measles is extremely infectious, spread by coughs and sneezes, usually starting with cold-like symptoms and increasing fever, followed by a rash a few days later. Serious complications include pneumonia, meningitis and, rarely, measles can be fatal. Immunosuppressed individuals and young infants are most at risk of complications. It is also more severe in pregnancy, and increases the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth or preterm delivery.

Call to action

There is no specific treatment for measles, the MMR vaccine is the safest and most effective protection against the disease. Two doses of MMR give 99% protection against measles.

It is never too late to catch up if anyone has missed one or both doses; children and adults can get the MMR vaccine free on the NHS. We would ask everyone to check their own and their family's MMR status and get vaccinated if you have not had 2 doses. This can be done by

- Checking your child's Red Book
- Using the NHS app
- Contacting your GP practice

It is especially important to check you are fully immunised if you

- Attend school, college or university
- Are going to travel abroad
- Are planning a pregnancy
- Are a frontline health or social care worker

Resources

[Why vaccination is important and the safest way to protect yourself - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

[Vaccination and immunisation | Healthy Surrey](#)

[Whooping cough - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

[Information for individuals who have whooping cough - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[Confirmed cases of pertussis in England by month - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[National Measles Standard Incident – measles epidemiology \(from October 2023\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)