

Before you travel this Christmas, protect yourself and your family against measles.

Over 30,000 measles cases were reported by European countries between January and October 2023, with Romania being the most affected country. The Ministry of Health in Romania declared a measles epidemic due to multiple outbreaks across the country with more than 2,000 measles cases and high hospital admissions of infected children.

Measles is a serious disease and can hospitalise as many as 1 in 5 cases and have long term and life-threatening consequences. It is also extremely infectious – one person can pass on the disease to nine out of ten unvaccinated people so our communities are at risk. Those most at risk include people with weakened immune systems, pregnant women and babies.

There is no medical treatment for measles; vaccination is the best protection against becoming seriously unwell.

If children come into contact with the disease during the holidays they could miss significant periods of school, as unvaccinated contacts of measles cases may be asked to stay off school for up to 3 weeks (21 days).

Therefore health professionals are encouraging people to check that they and their children have had two doses of the measles mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine, especially ahead of any travel plans this Christmas.

The MMR vaccine is safe and effective and provides long lasting protection against measles, mumps and rubella. It has prevented over 20 million cases since the early 1980s, saving over 4,500 lives.

It's vital parents take up the offer of free NHS MMR vaccinations for their children when offered at one year of age, and as a pre-school booster at three years and four months of age.

If you or your children have missed these vaccinations in the past, or are unsure whether you or family members have had two full doses, check your red book or contact your GP to check.

Considering the rise in recent cases and how easy it is to transmit to the most vulnerable in our families, now is the time to protect you and your family with a free MMR vaccination.

You can book an appointment with your GP.

If you are registered with a GP Practice in Barking and Dagenham, and your child is aged 0-5 years, you can book your child to have a vaccine by visiting togetherfirst.co.uk/booking-measles at the weekend.

For primary school children who have missed immunisations you can contact Vaccination UK on 0208 0174292

If you would prefer for you or your child to receive the vaccination abroad, you will need to bring back evidence of any vaccinations, including which vaccine was received, and make your GP aware once you return to the UK.

Protection against MMR is not immediate, so keep yourself safe by getting immunised as soon as possible before travel and be aware of signs and symptoms of the disease.

Anyone with symptoms of measles is being advised to stay at home, avoid contact with others and phone their GP or NHS 111 for advice.

Measles symptoms to be aware of include:

- high fever
- sore, red, watery eyes
- coughing
- aching and feeling generally unwell
- a blotchy red brown rash, which usually appears after the initial symptoms.

For further information about measles and MMR vaccine, visit the NHS website - www.nhs.uk/conditions/measles/