

## **Maintaining Immunisation Programmes During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

### **NHS Immunisations FAQs (for public)**

#### **Why aren't you stopping routine immunisations?**

Whilst preventing the spread of COVID-19 and caring for those infected is a public health priority, it is very important to maintain good coverage of immunisations, particularly in the childhood programme. In addition to protecting the individual, this will avoid outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases that could harm individuals and increase further the numbers of patients requiring health services.

#### **Should people/babies really still go and be immunised at their GP surgery even though there is a risk that by doing this they may be infected with COVID-19?**

Your GP surgery or health clinic will take all possible precautions to protect you and your baby from COVID-19. People should still attend for routine vaccinations unless they are unwell (check with your GP whether you should still attend) or self-isolating because they have been in contact with someone with COVID-19. In these circumstances please rearrange your appointment. Vaccines are the most effective way to prevent against other infectious diseases. Babies, toddlers and pre-school children in particular need vaccinations to protect them from measles, mumps, rubella (MMR), rotavirus, diphtheria, whooping cough, meningitis, polio, tetanus, hepatitis B, TB and more.

#### **What are "routine" childhood immunisations?**

Different vaccines are given at different ages to protect you and your child. They form part of the national immunisation programme and are offered free of charge by the NHS. The national immunisation programme is highly successful in reducing the incidence of serious and sometimes life-threatening diseases such as pneumococcal and meningococcal infections, whooping cough, diphtheria and measles. It remains important to maintain the best possible vaccine uptake to prevent a resurgence of these infections.

Some children will also need protection with neonatal BCG and hepatitis B vaccination. Both BCG and all doses of targeted hepatitis B vaccines should also be offered in a timely manner.

#### **If you are not doing school age immunisations, isn't there a risk that we will see big increases in the diseases those children are normally vaccinated against?**

School aged immunisations will be rescheduled. UK government has provided clear public health advice on specific measures to take to prevent further Coronavirus cases which includes social distancing.

#### **Do GP surgeries really still have the time to do immunisations?**

Practices will be busy responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the routine childhood immunisation programme will continue to play an important role in preventing ill-health through causes other than coronavirus infection.

**How important is it that you get your immunisation at the time you are called? Is there a risk in delaying for a few months and if there isn't then why don't we stop and reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19 through a visit to the general practice?**

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that routine childhood immunisations are started and completed on time. This will help protect the infant or child from a range of serious and sometimes life-threatening infections. Whilst infections such as invasive pneumococcal and meningococcal disease are now much reduced in incidence, this has only come about because of high levels of vaccination. To prevent resurgence, infants still need protecting through vaccination. Pertussis continues to circulate at elevated levels, and it remains important that pregnant women are offered the pertussis vaccine, and that their babies start receiving protection against this, and other infections, from 8 weeks of age.

**There is a shortage of liquid infant paracetamol which is often used by parents and carers to help manage a baby's reaction to their routine immunisations so won't parents stop bringing their babies because of this?**

Vaccination to protect from serious conditions should not be delayed. Whilst parents should continue to try to obtain and administer infant paracetamol if possible, infant vaccines can and should still be given even if it is not possible to give prophylactic paracetamol.

Where parents have been unable to obtain infant paracetamol, the following advice will apply.

- Fever can be expected after any vaccination but is more common when the MenB vaccine (Bexsero) is given with the other routine vaccines at eight and sixteen weeks of age.
- In infants who do develop a fever after vaccination, the fever tends to peak around six hours after vaccination and is nearly always gone completely within two days.
- Information about treating a fever in children is available from the NHS UK webpage "Fever in children" at [www.nhs.uk/conditions/fever-in-children/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/fever-in-children/).
- If an infant still has a fever 48 hours after vaccination or if parents or carers are concerned about their infant's health at any time, they should seek advice from their GP or NHS 111.
- The diseases that the vaccines protect against are very serious and therefore vaccination should not be delayed because of concerns about post-vaccination fever.

**How will parents and carers know when their babies have a temperature after their regular immunisations whether it is an expected reaction or COVID-19?**

The vaccines given may cause a fever which usually resolved within 48 hours (or 6 to 11 days following MMR). This is a common expected reaction and isolation is not required, unless COVID-19 is suspected.

When the MenB vaccine (Bexsero) is given with other vaccines at 8 and 16 weeks of age, fever is more common. Where parents and carers are able to obtain liquid infant paracetamol, they should follow existing PHE guidance on the use of prophylactic paracetamol following MenB vaccination available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/menb-vaccine-and-paracetamol>.

Indications to date suggest that COVID-19 causes mild or asymptomatic illness in infants and children. As has always been recommended, any infant with fever after vaccination should be monitored and if parents or carers are concerned about their infant's health at any time, they should seek advice from their GP or NHS 111. Post-immunisation fever alone is not a reason to self-isolate.

This advice applies to recently vaccinated people of all ages.

Any infant with fever after vaccination should be monitored and if parents or carers are concerned about their infant's health at any time, they should seek advice from their GP or NHS 111.