Why is the MMR school vaccination program needed?

There has been a significant increase in the number of measles cases in NSW in the past few years, with a large number occurring in adolescents and young adults. Many people have contracted the disease while travelling overseas and there continues to be a number of people in some areas of NSW who can catch the disease when it is brought into Australia by travellers.

Teenagers and young adults are the group most likely to catch measles when it spreads in NSW because they may have missed their vaccinations and/or the second dose was not recommended in the National Immunisation Schedule during their childhood. Two vaccine doses are required for complete protection.

NSW Health is offering one dose of free measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine to students in Years 7 to 12 who are susceptible to these diseases and do not have a record of having received two doses of MMR vaccine.

Q. What are measles, mumps and rubella?

Measles is a highly infectious virus causing fever, cough and a rash. One in 15 children with measles develops pneumonia and 1 in 1,000 develops encephalitis (brain inflammation). For every 10 children who develop measles encephalitis, 1 will die and many will have permanent brain damage. About 1 in 100,000 will develop brain degeneration, which is always fatal.

Mumps is an infectious disease causing swollen neck glands and fever. One in 5,000 infected children will develop brain inflammation; 1 in 5 males past puberty will develop inflammation of the testes. Occasionally mumps causes infertility or deafness. Mumps infection during the first trimester of pregnancy may result in spontaneous abortion.

Rubella (German Measles) is an infectious viral disease causing rash, fever and swollen glands. It causes severe abnormalities in babies of infected pregnant women. Patients usually develop a rash, painful swollen glands and painful joints. One in 3,000 develops thrombocytopenia (low platelet count that causes bruising/bleeding). One in 6,000 develops brain inflammation. Up to nine in 10 babies infected during the first trimester of pregnancy will have a major congenital abnormality, such as deafness, blindness, or heart defects.

Q. How are measles, mumps and rubella spread?

These viruses are spread by coughing and sneezing. Measles is one of the most easily spread of all human infections. Just being in the same room as someone with measles can result in infection.

Q. How does vaccination work?

Vaccination stimulates the body's immune system in the same way as the real disease but without causing symptoms of the disease. Most vaccines provide the body with ‘memory’ so that an individual doesn’t get the disease if exposed to it.

Q. Who should be vaccinated?

Students who do not have evidence of having received two doses of MMR vaccine (at least 4 weeks apart) should be vaccinated now. If this is your child’s first dose of MMR vaccine, you should contact your doctor to arrange a second free dose of MMR vaccine in 4 weeks time.
Q. What if I cannot find my child's immunisation records or I cannot remember if my child has already received the MMR vaccine?

It is safe for your child to receive another dose of MMR vaccine. You should discuss whether your child needs a second dose of free MMR vaccine (due 4 weeks after dose 1) with your local doctor.

To know if your child has previously received MMR vaccine you can:
- Check your child's Blue Book and/or Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR) Immunisation History Statement
- Request a copy of your child's Immunisation History Statement from the ACIR:
  - By telephone on 1800 653 809
  - By email on acir@medicareaustralia.gov.au
  - Online at www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/online
  - In person at the local Medicare office
- Check with your child's doctor

Please do not contact your local Public Health Unit as they do not store MMR records.

Q. How effective is the vaccine and are further booster doses required?

MMR vaccine is very effective in providing protection against measles, mumps and rubella infection and two doses are required for complete protection. Booster doses are currently not recommended.

Q. Who should not be vaccinated?

MMR vaccine should not be given to people who:
- have had anaphylaxis following a previous dose of MMR vaccine
- have had anaphylaxis following any vaccine component (listed below)
- are pregnant (pregnancy should be avoided for 28 days after vaccination)
- have received a live vaccine in the past 4 weeks e.g. varicella (chickenpox), BCG (tuberculosis) or yellow fever
- have received a blood transfusion/immunoglobulin injection within the previous 11 months
- have impaired immunity i.e:
  - people with HIV/AIDS
  - people taking high-dose oral corticosteroids
  - people who are receiving high-dose systemic immunosuppressive treatment, general radiation or x-ray therapy
  - people suffering from malignant conditions of the reticuloendothelial system, including lymphoma, leukaemia and Hodgkin's disease.

Q. What are the MMR vaccine components?

The MMR vaccine contains measles mumps and rubella viruses (in a weakened form), lactose, neomycin, sorbitol and mannitol. The additives are included in the vaccine to either assist it to work or to act as a preservative.

Q. How safe are vaccines?

Vaccines used in Australia must pass strict safety testing before being approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). This testing is required by law and is conducted using thousands of people in large clinical trials. In addition, the TGA monitors the safety of vaccines once they are in use.

Q. What are the side effects of MMR vaccination?

MMR vaccine is safe, effective and well tolerated. Side effects are commonly mild and may involve feeling generally unwell, fever and/or rash (not infectious may occur 5-12 days after MMR vaccination). Serious side effects including anaphylaxis (see information below), transient lymphadenopathy (short-lived swelling of the lymph nodes), arthralgia (joint pain) and thrombocytopenia (increased potential for bruising and bleeding) are extremely rare.

Q. What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that may result in unconsciousness and death if not treated quickly. It occurs very rarely after any vaccination. The nurses are fully trained in the treatment of anaphylaxis.

Q. Should the vaccine be given to a female student who is or thinks she may be pregnant?

No. Any female student who is or thinks she may be pregnant should not be vaccinated. On the day of the clinic the vaccination nurse will ask female students if they are or could be pregnant. If a student answers yes to this question, she will not be vaccinated. The student will be urged to immediately discuss the issue with her parent/guardian and to seek medical help. She will also be provided with contact details for a health referral service that will provide advice, support and guidance. Women who have received MMR vaccine should not become pregnant for 28 days after vaccination.

Q. Will I receive a record of my child's MMR vaccination?

Yes, your child will be given a record of vaccination to take home.

Q. What will happen to my child's information?

The information you provide on the MMR Consent form is subject to strict confidentiality and privacy protections contained in NSW and Commonwealth legislation (see the following Privacy Statement).

Q. Where can I find more information about immunisation?

More information is available:
- on the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance website: www.ncirs.edu.au
- on the Therapeutic Goods Administration website: www.tga.gov.au
Our obligations
The NSW public health service is committed to safeguarding the privacy of client information, and has implemented measures to comply with its obligations under the Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002. Our staff are bound by law, by NSW Health privacy policy and by a strict code of conduct to maintain confidentiality of client information.

This leaflet provides you with details of what personal information is held about you and your child, how you can access this information and the purposes for which personal information is used and disclosed. Your personal information includes personal details about you and your child and personal health information relating to your child’s immunisation.

Collection
Personal information is collected so that your child can be provided with the appropriate immunisation services. Only information that is relevant and necessary for your child’s immunisation and to manage immunisation services is collected.

Information is collected directly from you and your child, wherever possible. Information may need to be collected from your child’s school and other health professionals who have treated your child. In an emergency, information may also need to be collected from another family member, friend, carer or other person who can help us to provide your child with the best care.

Security of information collected
Personal information may be held in a variety of ways. Most commonly, information may be held as a paper medical record, and/or an electronic medical record forming part of a secure computerised database.

All reasonable steps will be taken to ensure the information we collect about you and your child is stored securely. Legislation requires that medical records be retained for certain periods of time depending on the type of record and facility. Appropriate systems and policies are in place to protect your information from loss, unauthorised access and misuse.

Use and disclosure
Information related to you or your child will be used or disclosed for purposes directly related to your child's immunisation, and in ways that you would reasonably expect. This may include the transfer of relevant information to your GP, to your child's GP, to another treating health service or hospital, to the Ambulance Service of NSW, to a specialist for a referral, for pathology tests, and so on.

Some client information must be disclosed to State and Commonwealth government agencies to comply with laws regarding the reporting of notifiable diseases and statistics. Personal information may be required as evidence in court when subpoenaed.

Client information for billing, statutory reporting and other purposes may be used or disclosed where required for the operation of the NSW health service, including safety and quality improvement initiatives. For example, where relevant, we may need to disclose client information to Medicare, or private health funds.

Personal health information may also be used by this health service or disclosed outside the health service to enable appropriate health services to be provided to you, for example:

- to contact you regarding client satisfaction surveys that help us to evaluate and improve our services
- to students and other staff for training purposes
- to other health services and authorised third parties to help prevent a serious and imminent threat to someone's life, health or welfare, such as in an emergency
- to claims managers and associated persons for the purpose of managing a complaint, legal action, or claim brought against the health service or a treating health professional
- for purposes relating to the operation of the NSW health service and treatment of our clients, including funding, planning, safety and quality improvement activities
Use and disclosure continued
The law also allows or requires for your personal health information to be disclosed to other third parties, for example:

- to researchers for public interest research projects as approved by a Human Research and Ethics Committee
- to other health services or law enforcement agencies, such as the Police, if you provide us with information relating to a serious crime, including assault, domestic violence, child abuse, and so on
- to other agencies where the information relates to the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or young person
- Your consent will be sought prior to the use or disclosure of client information for purposes other than those listed above.
- If you do not wish for us to collect, use or disclose certain information about you or your child, you need to tell us and we will discuss this with you.

Access to your information
You are entitled to request access to your personal information held by us, and to that of your child. Access to your personal information may be declined in special circumstances, such as where giving access would put you or another person at risk of harm. You may be charged a fee if you request copies of your personal information or medical record.

If you believe the information we hold about you is incorrect and an error has been made, please let us know and we will correct the information. If we believe the information is correct, you may request for your view to be noted on the record.

Requests for access to, or correction of, your medical record should be addressed to your local health service.

Contact us
If you have questions or a complaint about the privacy of your personal information, please contact your local health service.