

# Quick answers to frequent MMR questions during the 2019 measles outbreaks (12 September 2019)



The Immunisation  
Advisory Centre

MMR vaccine is a live attenuated vaccine. Please familiarise yourself with the information in the *Measles, Mumps, and Rubella* chapters in the [Immunisation Handbook 2017 2nd Edition](#), including the contraindications and precautions for this vaccine.

## Why have we been asked to limit MMR vaccination to priority groups?

Currently, the distribution of MMR vaccine stock is limited. It is important to maintain the National Immunisation Schedule for children aged under 5 years and increase protection against measles in the population groups where the need is greatest. The Ministry of Health has provided the following guidance for general practices and PHOs to target measles vaccinations to priority groups.

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### In Auckland

- » Actively recall children for MMR1 to be delivered from 12 months – this can be recorded as 15-months event on the NIR. Other 15-months vaccines can be given at the same time.
- » MMR2 should continue to be offered at 4 years old with active recall.
- » Continue to recall those aged under 5 years who are overdue for immunisations, as per business as usual.
- » Offer 15–29 year olds, and particularly Pasifika 15–29 year olds, one dose of the MMR vaccine.

### Nationally

- » Ensure all children across New Zealand receive their vaccines on time at 15 months (12 months in Auckland) and 4 years.
- » Proactively recall children aged up to 14 years who do not have one documented dose of MMR vaccine.
- » Parents who are concerned about their infant who is aged 6–11 months being at high risk of exposure to measles can request an MMR dose 0.
  - » The doctor or nurse prescriber may provide a prescription for this vaccine dose to be administered if it is felt to be appropriate.
  - » The administration of Priorix® to infants aged 6–11 months is off-label. There are no safety concerns.

Vaccinators can help ensure the MMR vaccine is used to protect the most vulnerable populations by prioritising people from the groups listed above.

## Can we give the MMR vaccine to infants aged under 12 months?

**Infants aged 6–11 months can receive their first MMR vaccination:**

- » If they are travelling overseas to a country with a measles outbreak.
  - » This dose is a Schedule immunisation and can be administered by an authorised vaccinator without a doctor's prescription.
- » On parental request if there are concerns about a high-risk of exposure to measles and their GP advises administration of MMR.
  - » This dose needs to be prescribed in the infant's medical notes by the doctor or nurse prescriber.
  - » The administration of Priorix® to infants aged 6–11 months is off-label. There are no safety concerns.
  - » Standing orders cannot be used for administration of Priorix under this MMR0 criterion.

**MMR administered at 6–11 months of age is considered dose zero (MMR0)**

- » The infant will still require the 15-months and 4-years MMR vaccinations as per the Schedule.

## PMS entry and claiming for MMR0

- » Enter the dose on the NIR using your PMS 'MMR at-risk', 'MMR misc' or 'MMR primary' vaccine option.
- » Leave the Schedule 15 months and 4 years MMR vaccinations as to be given in the future.
- » The additional vaccination at 6–11 months of age is funded. An Immunisation Subsidy can be claimed.
- » If the MMR 'at-risk', 'misc' or 'primary' vaccine option has not been activated in your PMS, contact the PMS provider for advice.

**Infants aged under 6 months are too young to receive an MMR vaccination**

## Can we give the MMR vaccination due at 15 months early?

**Children aged 12–14 months who live in the Auckland region**

Children in this age group, who are living in the Auckland region are advised to receive all four vaccines due at 15 months from 12 months of age. Practices are asked to actively precall infants to receive these vaccines from 12 months of age.

**Children aged 12–14 months who live outside the Auckland region**

Children in this age group, who are travelling to Auckland or an overseas country with a measles outbreak are advised to receive all four vaccines due at 15 months from 12 months of age.

### For all other children aged 12–14 months

Immunisation at 15 months of age as per the Immunisation Schedule is recommended. However, all four vaccines due at 15 months can be given from 12 months of age on parental request.

## Can we give the 4 years MMR vaccine early?

The second MMR vaccine dose is recommended to be given on-time at 4 years of age. After one MMR vaccination 90–95% of people are fully protected from measles, hence the first dose is the priority for all.

## If the 4 years MMR vaccine dose is given early, does the child need another MMR again at age 4 years?

No. Only two doses of MMR vaccine are required if they are both given from 12 months of age. The second MMR vaccine is a revaccination for the 5–10% of individuals who fail to become protected against measles after the first dose. Nearly all individuals will be protected after the second dose.

## If we give the 4 years MMR vaccine dose early, can we give DTaP-IPV early as well?

No. It is important to wait until the child is 4 years of age to give the DTaP-IPV to ensure the child has some protection against pertussis through their primary school years.

## Catch-up MMR vaccination

**Children aged 5–14 years**

Recall children in this age group who do not have one documented dose of MMR vaccine.

**Young people aged 15–29 years**

Recall young people in this age group who do not have one documented dose of MMR vaccine with a focus on Pacific peoples within those groups. It is appropriate to vaccinate if the person cannot easily locate immunisation records.

While the priority is currently on the administration of the first MMR vaccine dose, please add a recall due in 3–6 months for young people who require a second catch-up MMR vaccination.

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**Can young people aged 18–29 years who are living in the Auckland region and who are not eligible to receive publicly funded healthcare buy MMR vaccine?**

No. All MMR vaccine stock is supplied by ProPharma and cannot be sold. During the current measles outbreaks administer the MMR vaccine to these adults when it is prescribed in their medical notes by their doctor.

### **Adults aged 30–50 years**

MMR vaccination is not currently prioritised for these adults.

Please offer to rebook (at least a month out) or add a recall due in 3–6 months to contact any adult who requests MMR vaccination but is not able to receive it at this time. Alternatively, practices may choose to keep a list of these adults that is easily accessible by all staff.

### **Adults born before 1969 in New Zealand or overseas**

Adults in this age group are not recommended to receive MMR vaccination. Generally, they are considered to be immune to measles.

No measles vaccine was available in New Zealand until 1969 and measles is so infectious that people born before this were highly likely to be exposed. For those born overseas, it is fairly similar as most countries introduced a measles vaccine in the late 1960s, 1970s or later.

### **Should we order serology to check for measles immunity?**

No. Evidence of immunity for adults born prior to 1969 is simply being born before 1969. Evidence of immunity for adults born in 1969 or later is two documented doses of MMR vaccine.

### **Do adults aged 18 years or over need MMR revaccination if they have had chemotherapy or radiotherapy for cancer?**

If the person was considered immune before chemotherapy, they are still considered immune to measles, mumps and rubella after completion of treatment and immune system recovery. Chemotherapy and radiotherapy for cancer does not remove immune system memory cells.

### **Adults born prior to 1969**

- » Are considered immune to measles. Vaccinating these adults post-chemotherapy is not indicated.

### **Adults born 1969 or later**

- » Who have two documented doses of MMR are considered immune. No more MMR vaccinations are required.
- » Who have one documented dose of MMR prior to chemotherapy have completed their primary dose of MMR and would receive a second documented dose of MMR because this is the standard schedule, i.e. the second dose of MMR is for the 5–10% who didn't become immune after their first dose and is not about boosting the response to the first dose.
  - » While the priority is currently on the administration of the first MMR vaccine dose, please add a recall due in 3–6 months for adults who require a second catch-up MMR vaccination.
- » Who do not have any documented doses of MMR vaccine receive two documented doses of MMR vaccine six months post-chemotherapy and when their lymphocyte count is  $>1.0 \times 10^9/L$ .
  - » While the priority is currently on the administration of the first MMR vaccine dose, please add a recall due in 3–6 months for adults who require a second catch-up MMR vaccination.

Only pre-HSCT (stem cell or bone marrow transplant) conditioning completely remove a person's immune system including memory cells. Re-vaccination with MMR vaccine usually occurs 2 years post-HSCT.

### **Do children who received a measles only or measles/rubella vaccine overseas need MMR vaccination?**

Yes. Two doses of the MMR vaccine given from 12 months of age are recommended irrespective of previous measles vaccination.

### **Do children who have had measles still need to receive the MMR vaccine?**

Yes. Two doses of MMR vaccine are recommended to protect the child from mumps and rubella.

### **How long after having measles can a child receive vaccines?**

A child can receive Schedule vaccines, including varicella vaccine, as soon as they are due if the child is not acutely unwell.

### **Can a person with an egg allergy receive the MMR vaccine?**

Yes. Neither egg allergy nor anaphylaxis are contraindications for receipt of the MMR vaccine.

### **Can a close contact of a woman who is pregnant or of a person who is immunocompromised receive the MMR vaccine?**

Yes. MMR vaccine viruses are considered to be non-transmissible. It is also important to reduce the risk of the mother and those who are immunocompromised being exposed to measles disease.

### **Can a pregnant woman receive the MMR vaccine?**

No. Live vaccines are not given to pregnant women.

### **How soon after having a baby can a woman receive the MMR vaccine?**

As soon as baby has been delivered.

### **Can a breastfeeding woman receive the MMR vaccine?**

Yes. There is no risk to the mother or child from giving MMR to breastfeeding women.

### **Can a person who is immunocompromised receive the MMR vaccine?**

No. If your patient has a medical condition or is on a treatment that affects their immune system, refer to sections 4.3.2, 4.3.3 and 22.6.2, and table 22.2 in the Immunisation Handbook 2017 2nd Edition for more information on treatments and timing of vaccination.

### **Is there a single antigen measles vaccine available in New Zealand?**

No. The measles vaccine is only available as one of the components of the MMR vaccine in New Zealand.

### **Are M-M-R II® and Priorix® interchangeable?**

Yes. M-M-R II and Priorix are fully interchangeable. The doses must be given a minimum of four weeks apart.