

MEASLES IN EUROPE

A reminder for travellers to be up to date with measles vaccine

On 24 March 2017, the European Centre for Disease prevention and Control (ECDC) provided an update on the measles situation in Europe. An ongoing outbreak in Romania was highlighted, with a total of 3799 measles cases reported between September 2016 and 17 March 2017 [1].

As of 17 February 2017, a total of 16 deaths have been reported in Romania, all in people who were immunocompromised or had other health problems. An intensive vaccination programme is ongoing [2]. In 2016, a number of other European countries reported measles cases, this increase in numbers continues in 2017 [1, 3]. From February 2016 to January 2017, six European countries: the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom also reported measles cases where the probable country of infection was Romania [2]. As of 26 April 2017, measles outbreaks are ongoing in a number of European countries; monthly updates on reported cases are available from ECDC [4].

Measles is a highly infectious illness spread by airborne/droplet transmission. Symptoms include fever, runny nose, conjunctivitis and cough. A rash then usually develops, starting at the head, then spreading to the trunk and limbs, over three to four days. Individuals are infectious from their first symptoms to four days after the rash appears and the incubation period is about ten days. Complications can occur and in the UK, the death rate is approximately one in 5,000 cases. Risk of death from measles is age-related: high in children under one year of age, lower in children aged one to nine years, rising again in teenagers and adults [5].

Advice for travellers

As part of your travel preparation, make sure you are up-to-date with all currently recommended UK vaccines including measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. Two doses of MMR are needed for a person to be considered fully protected.

MMR vaccine can be given from six months of age before travel to a risk country and/or where an outbreak is occurring.

If you have not had measles (the illness) or if you have not had two doses of MMR, you may be at risk if visiting countries reporting cases. This is especially a concern if staying with friends or family, mixing with the local population or going to mass gatherings like festivals, sports events or pilgrimages. Measles is easily passed from person to person and can be a serious illness in adults (as well as children). It is never too late to have the vaccine.

You may wish to consider carrying a record documenting vaccination against MMR when travelling abroad

Advice for health professionals

Guidance on measles vaccination is available in Immunisation against infectious disease Chapter 21. Advice on immunisation against measles is also available for those whose immunisation status is uncertain. In the UK, measles is a notifiable disease. Any case of suspected measles should be notified to the local Health Protection Team