

PRESS RELEASE

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**NHS NORTH SOMERSET TO TARGET FALLING CHILD
IMMUNISATION FIGURES**

Too few children in North Somerset are receiving the immunisations they need to protect them from serious illnesses, say NHS North Somerset. The PCT is launching a high profile awareness campaign in June to alert mothers to the dangers of not having their children vaccinated.

Said NHS North Somerset Director of Public Health Becky Pollard:

“We want to ensure that mothers are aware of the vital importance of immunisation as a means of protecting their children from serious, often life-threatening illnesses. There are some diseases that can kill children or cause lasting damage to their health. Immunisations are given to prepare a child’s immune system (its natural defence system) to fight off those diseases when your child comes into contact with them.”

The PCT carried out a review of immunisation rates for children under the age of 5 in North Somerset earlier this year, which revealed that immunisation rates were especially low for immunisations given from 12 months onwards. It was also found that the lowest rates of immunisation in the county included children of mothers under 25 and over 35 years of age, and those living in central Weston.

Explained NHS North Somerset Health Improvement Specialist Lianne Straus: "We believe the reasons for low uptake of immunisations are two-fold.

"The controversy surrounding the MMR vaccine made many mothers wary of vaccinations and their possible side effects. Many of them also have fears over autism - fears that have been further exaggerated by media scare stories. Despite there being no evidence to substantiate these fears, and extensive research dispelling these media stories, there has been a long-lasting impact. Also, many younger mothers simply do not realise how dangerous many childhood diseases can be, and the importance of completing the whole course of vaccinations for children. Our awareness campaign aims to dispel some of the myths surrounding vaccination and vaccines and emphasise the importance of protecting children against the diseases which can seriously compromise their long term health."

The campaign will feature posters leaflets, radio and cinema advertisements which aim to raise awareness of how failure to vaccinate can make a child vulnerable to diseases which have the potential to cause liability or death.

There is also concern about the immunisation status of the children of British holidaymakers heading off to Europe this summer. Last month a warning was given by the World Health Organisation about a major outbreak of measles on the continent. The WHO confirmed there had been more than 6,500 cases reported across Europe, with France the hardest hit country. The U.N. health agency in Geneva revealed there had been 4,937 reported cases in France between January and March - compared with 5,090 during all of 2010.

Becky Pollard added: "I would not discourage anyone from travelling abroad – but I would make sure people are aware of the risks. Children can pick up serious diseases on holiday as well as at home. But whether you are staying in the UK or going abroad our advice is to get your children vaccinated give them the protection they need. Childhood diseases have not died out, although

rates have fallen substantially, precisely because mothers have had their children immunised from babyhood.

Without immunisation children are much more vulnerable to infections such as meningitis C and measles. Child health experts agree that the benefits of immunisation far outweigh the small risk of side effects and after a completed vaccination programme, a child should have lifelong protection against measles, mumps, rubella and meningitis C as well as protection against diphtheria and tetanus for at least 20 years.

All vaccines given to children have excellent safety records and the risk of serious side effects or complications is very low compared with those associated with the diseases themselves. Parents and carers should call their GP practice to arrange an appointment for any vaccinations their children are missing.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

- NHS North Somerset is the local Primary Care Trust for North Somerset. The trust was established in April 2002 to ensure the provision of the highest quality healthcare services to the residents of North Somerset. It was recently assessed as one of the most improved PCTs in England by the Care Quality Commission.

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Routine childhood immunisation programme

When to immunise	Diseases protected against	Vaccine given
Two months old	Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio and <i>Haemophilus influenzae</i> type b (Hib) Pneumococcal infection	DTaP/IPV/Hib and Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV)
Three months old	Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio and <i>Haemophilus influenzae</i> type b (Hib) Meningitis C (meningococcal group C)	DTaP/IPV/Hib and MenC
Four months old	Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio and <i>Haemophilus influenzae</i> type b (Hib) Meningitis C Pneumococcal infection	DTaP/IPV/Hib, MenC and PCV
Between 12 and 13 months	<i>Haemophilus influenzae</i> type b (Hib) and meningitis C Measles, mumps and rubella (German measles) Pneumococcal infection	Hib/MenC MMR and PCV
Three years and four months or soon after	Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio Measles, mumps and rubella	DTaP/IPV or dTaP/IPV and MMR
Girls aged 12 to 13 years	Cervical cancer caused by human papillomavirus types 16 and 18	HPV
13 to 18 years old	Tetanus, diphtheria and polio	Td/IPV