

MMR Information sheet 1

Introduction

This pack presents the latest scientifically researched information on the MMR vaccine and is designed to provide parents with a range of materials that they can use to make an informed decision about immunising their children against measles, mumps and rubella.

The pack comprises information and fact sheets and a leaflet. It also includes the 'top ten' myths and truths about the alleged link between MMR and autism.

A frequently asked question sheet deals with the single vaccine issue and a comprehensive list of websites provides readers with ready access to further information, some of which is updated on almost a daily basis.

Designed for parents and health professionals, this pack should allay everyone's concerns about the safety and efficacy of the MMR vaccine.

The controversy

A link between the MMR immunisation and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) and autism was first suggested by a group of researchers in the Inflammatory Bowel Disease Study Group at the Royal Free Hospital (RFH-IBDSG) in London (Wakefield *et al.*, 1998). Since then a number of key bodies including the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Department of Health (DH) and independent expert advisory groups including the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) have all reviewed the evidence and concluded that it does not support a link between MMR and these conditions. Those independent studies set up specifically to look for evidence of a causal link between MMR and autism/bowel disease have also found no link (De Wilde, *et al.*, 2001; Taylor, Miller *et al.*, 1999; Farrington, Miller & Taylor, 2001; Taylor, Miller *et al.*, 2002).

The continuing adverse publicity in the media concerning the alleged effects of the MMR immunisation has resulted in less public confidence in the safety of the vaccine. This has produced a decline in uptake by 8 percentage points from the peak coverage of 92 per cent in 1995 (PHLS, 2001). Healthcare professionals and parents need accurate, evidence-based information upon which to base an informed discussion.

The media coverage of MMR has raised concerns among parents who need to receive prompt answers to their questions in order that the benefits and risks of the vaccine can be balanced against the risk of the disease. The DH strategy states that, unless there are contraindications, all parents should be encouraged to have their child vaccinated (DoH, 2001).