



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Volume 9, Issue 2

APRIL 2012

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH, HSE SOUTH  
(CORK & KERRY)

IMMUNISATION FOCUS

## FAQ: SERONEGATIVE WOMEN OF CHILDBEARING AGE – UPDATED ADVICE

The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) recently issued updated advice on what is considered satisfactory evidence of protection against rubella.

*“All seronegative women of child bearing age who need to be protected against rubella should be offered 1 dose of MMR vaccine. Satisfactory evidence of protection would include documentation of having received at least one dose of rubella containing vaccine or a positive antibody test (IgG level >10IU/mL) for rubella.”*

The previous advice said that satisfactory evidence of protection was either documented 2 doses of rubella containing vaccine or a positive antibody text.

Rubella is a highly effective vaccine and people generally can be considered immune after one dose. Although titres decrease with time, high rates of seropositivity are maintained. Plotkin, who is one of the world’s leading vaccine experts, states in his book, Vaccines, - *“Indeed, considering the long incubation period of rubella (14-21 days) an anamnestic response in vaccinees following exposure may offer sufficient protection, making the presence of detectable antibodies at the time of exposure unnecessary.”*<sup>1</sup>

(An anamnestic response is renewed rapid production of an antibody on the second (or subsequent) encounter with the same antigen).

Occasionally, a person with a documented history of rubella vaccination is found to have a negative serum IgG. Such persons may be given a dose of MMR vaccine and do not need to be retested for serologic evidence of rubella immunity. Further additional doses of MMR vaccine are not indicated, even if they are found to be seronegative in the future.

Please note that a second dose of MMR is still required to produce immunity to measles and mumps as one dose of the measles and mumps components is not as effective in inducing immunity as the rubella component.

<sup>1</sup> Plotkin, Orenstein. *Offit. Vaccines (5th Edition). Elsevier, 2008.*

## MEASLES AND SOCCER AGAIN!

Before the 2006 World Cup, held in Germany, fans and visitors were advised to have MMR vaccine before travelling, as at that time Germany was experiencing a large measles outbreak.

This year we have the EURO 2012, which is being held jointly in Poland and Ukraine, and once again there is a concern about measles.

There is an ongoing measles outbreak in the Ukraine with a current focus in the western part of the country bordering Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Almost 4,500 cases have been reported to date in 2012 and this might be an underestimate of the true numbers. The epidemic is expected to accelerate and spread geographically during the measles peak transmission season from February to June.

Unvaccinated or non-immune persons visiting Ukraine are at high risk for acquiring measles infection. The increased concentration and movement of people during mass gathering events such as EURO 2012 will further increase this risk of transmission.

It is important that all fans and other visitors, who have not already been fully vaccinated or have not previously had measles, are vaccinated against measles before they visit Ukraine.

Due to the overall low vaccine coverage in Ukraine, the risk of outbreaks of other vaccine preventable diseases, including rubella, mumps and diphtheria and their subsequent spread to other countries is also considered elevated. Travellers should review their vaccination status accordingly. WHO Europe’s travel advice for EURO 2012 is to seek medical advice 4-6 weeks prior to travelling.

The risk of acquiring measles and other vaccine preventable diseases is low if persons are fully vaccinated or immune due to past infection.

Editor: Dr. Fiona Ryan, Consultant in Public Health Medicine, Department of Public Health, Health Service Executive (HSE) South (Cork & Kerry). [www.immunisation.ie](http://www.immunisation.ie)

## USEFUL TRAVEL WEBSITES

The lengthening days makes us all yearn for summer holidays. Those heading off for international holidays, especially to more exotic locations, may need pre-travel health and immunisation advice. The following are some useful websites for travel health advice.

Health Protection Surveillance Centre: [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)

*This provides general health advice for international travellers.*

The Department of Foreign Affairs: [www.dfa.ie](http://www.dfa.ie)

*This provides travel advice to Irish people planning a trip overseas.*

The National Travel Health Network and Centre: [www.nathnac.org/travel](http://www.nathnac.org/travel)

*A UK site which provides information for travellers and health professionals.*

Centre for Disease Prevention and Control: [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)

*A very extensive site, with advice on all aspects of travel health and updates on disease activity across the world.*

Tropical Medicine Bureau: [www.tmb.ie](http://www.tmb.ie)

*Contains general travel advice, vaccination advice and country specific recommendations.*

Don't forget the danger from Malaria in certain countries. In recent years we have seen an increase in malaria in foreign-nationals resident in Ireland, who return for a holiday to their country of origin in malaria endemic regions. This group often takes inadequate or no prophylaxis. Often, people who have previously lived in endemic areas consider themselves "immune". However, this apparent immunity is due to the development of tolerance to the ongoing parasite burden and is not true immunity, as infection continues to occur but with little clinical illness. As early as 6 months after leaving an endemic area tolerance wanes.

General advice on avoidance of mosquito bites and country specific chemoprophylaxis recommendations are available on many of the websites listed above.

## PLEASE REMEMBER WE HAVE MOVED

**The Department of Public Health**, previously based in Sarsfield House, Wilton, and the Infectious Disease Unit, previously based in South Ring Business Park, have amalgamated and have now relocated to:-

**Floor 2, Block 8,**

**St. Finbarr's Hospital, Douglas Road, Cork.**

**Telephone Number: 353 (0)21 4927601, Fax Number: 353 (0)21 4923257**

All correspondence relating to the Cork City and County area, including infectious disease notifications should be sent to our new address in St. Finbarr's.

All correspondence for the Kerry area should continue to be sent to the Kerry office:-

**Community Services Offices, Rathass, Tralee, Co. Kerry.**

**Telephone Number: 353 (0)66 7184548, Fax Number: 353 (0)66 7184542**