POLIO: DON’T FORGET TO VACCINATE

Polio does still exist, although polio cases globally have decreased by over 99% from more than 350,000 cases in 1988 to 650 cases in 2011. This reduction is the result of the global effort to eradicate the disease. There are now only three countries in the world that have never stopped transmission of polio (Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan).

In February 2013 the World Health Organization (WHO) reported importation of wild polio virus in Egypt (exported from Pakistan) and Niger (exported from Nigeria). As long as a single child remains infected with polio virus, children in all countries are at risk of contracting the disease. The polio virus can easily be imported into a polio-free country and can spread rapidly amongst unimmunised individuals.

Inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) is a highly effective and safe vaccine.

- There is an ongoing risk of polio importation to Europe/Ireland from travellers to those areas where transmission is occurring. Achieving high coverage with inactivated polio vaccine continues to be a priority.
- All travellers to areas affected by polio should be fully vaccinated with appropriate doses of IPV.
- All immigrants from these areas should be appropriately vaccinated.

MMR AND TRAVEL

Measles transmission in Ireland is currently at low levels. Only 1 case has been reported in Cork and Kerry so far this year.

At this time of year many people begin to plan their holidays. Parents going on holiday with their children should make sure that they are up to date with their vaccines, particularly MMR vaccine which protects against measles, mumps and rubella. Measles is one of the most infectious diseases known to man. Two doses of MMR vaccine will protect most (99%) of those vaccinated.

People travelling to the UK should be aware of measles outbreaks that are being reported in England and Wales. Those areas most affected are Wales and the north east and north west of England.

Other countries where measles transmission has been high in the past 12 months include France, Italy, Romania and Spain.

Reminder:
Please remind parents to make sure that their children are up to date with vaccines, particularly MMR, before travel.

NEW IRISH IMMUNISATION GUIDELINES

The National Immunisation Advisory Committee is currently updating the Immunisation Guidelines for Ireland. The current edition was published in 2008 and it is planned to issue the 2013 edition this summer. The current guidelines and updates are available on the NIO website www.immunisation.ie

We will inform you when the 2013 edition is published.

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INFLUENZA 2012-2013: A PROLONGED SEASON

This season the rise in influenza started at the end of 2012 and has been sustained for over 3 months, an unusually long influenza season. Initially the majority of cases were influenza B but as influenza B decreased there was a rise in influenza A. Thankfully we are now seeing a decrease in influenza activity. However, hospitalisations and outbreaks continue to be reported.

There have been a large number of influenza outbreaks in longstay residential facilities. The rise is in large part due to increased awareness and reporting. In Cork and Kerry there have been 5 confirmed influenza outbreaks in longstay residential units to date this season, 4 influenza A and 1 influenza B. In the largest outbreak 8 residents and 7 staff were ill. It is important that Departments of Public Health are notified of suspected outbreaks of influenza in residential units with vulnerable residents so that we can promptly investigate and advise on management.

Initial results from the National Virus Reference Laboratory indicate good matching between the circulating strains of influenza and the strains contained in this season’s vaccine.

The experience this year of outbreaks in longstay residential facilities has highlighted a number of issues:

1. The uptake of influenza vaccine is generally high in residents.
2. The uptake is much lower in those admitted for short term respite care.
3. The uptake is very low in staff.
4. The uptake of pneumococcal vaccine in all residents is low.

Despite the high level of uptake of vaccine in residents of longstay residential facilities outbreaks continue to occur in these settings. It is important to remember that influenza vaccine is never 100% effective in preventing infection. The efficacy is lower in the elderly and those who are immunocompromised. However, vaccine still offers the best protection against influenza.

- During the flu season in addition to the vaccination of residents in long-stay facilities, those being booked for respite care should have their influenza vaccination status recorded. If they have not been vaccinated they should be advised to contact their G.P. regarding vaccination prior to admission.
- Maximising vaccine uptake in front-line health care workers is critical in the prevention of morbidity and mortality in vulnerable residents of longstay facilities.
- Pneumococcal vaccination is recommended for most residents of longstay facilities.

MMR CATCH UP CAMPAIGN APRIL 2013

Large outbreaks of measles have occurred in Ireland and Europe in recent years. These outbreaks have occurred as many young people have not received the recommended 2 doses of MMR vaccine.

In response to this and as part of Ireland’s commitment to the WHO’s European measles elimination strategy, the HSE is offering a dose of MMR vaccine to all second level students in 2012/13. This is a once off campaign. An MMR catch up campaign will commence in North Lee, South Lee, North Cork and West Cork secondary schools in April 2013. An MMR catch up campaign commenced in Kerry in October 2012.

All secondary school students who have not completed their 2 dose MMR vaccination schedule (or are not sure if they have had 2 doses) will be offered an opportunity to receive an MMR vaccine at a HSE clinic. Information letters will be distributed to parents/guardians/students by secondary schools. Appointments for immunisation will be issued by phoning a dedicated line to request an appointment. Clinics will be held for 2 weeks commencing 22nd April 2013.

If parents are unsure whether their child received 2 doses of MMR, the HSE is recommending another dose of MMR.

An MMR catch up campaign for primary schools students will be addressed in the next school year.