CHANGES TO SCHOOL IMMUNISATION PROGRAMME

The National Immunisation Advisory Committee recommends that all children should have 5 doses of tetanus and diphtheria, primary immunisation at 2, 4 and 6 months with boosters at 4-5 years and 11-14 years. In September 2007, the HSE –South (Cork & Kerry) will introduce a 2 in 1 (diTe) booster programme in 6th class in Primary Schools. This vaccine contains low dose diphtheria and tetanus and is recommended for 11–14 year olds. This programme will be delivered by the school immunisation teams.

While the revised Immunisation Guidelines, due to be published later this year, recommend the inclusion of pertussis in a 3 in 1 (dTap) booster, this vaccine is not yet available in Ireland. When it is available it will replace the diTe vaccine in 6th class.

The 6th class catch up MMR programme is now completed, from September 2007 all children entering 6th class will have already been offered the MMR vaccine in junior infants. The 4 in 1 (Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis and Polio) booster and the second dose MMR programme will continue to be delivered in Junior Infants by school immunisation teams.

NEONATAL BCG INTRODUCTION IN CORK

In October 2007 a Neonatal BCG programme will be introduced in Co. Cork, replacing the ‘at risk’ programme offered over the past number of years. This vaccine will be offered to newborns within the Cork University Maternity Hospital (CUMH). Outreach clinics will be organised to cater for babies who do not receive the vaccine before they leave the CUMH and for other children, by appointment, up to age 15 years whose parents request the vaccine.

This programme is being run by the Primary Continuing and Community Care (PCCC) medical services and is currently in the planning stage. Details of clinics, as well as information leaflets about BCG, will be sent out to all GP practices prior to the commencement of the programme. It is hoped that all health professionals who have contact with parents-to-be will be involved in advising on this vaccine so that parents-to-be can make an informed decision prior to the birth of their baby.

IMMUNISATION WEBSITE

The National Immunisation Office (NIO) continues to add useful information and resources on its website www.immunisation.ie. As Ireland is now a multicultural society, parents of young children may not have English as a first language. The website now provides translations of the general immunisation leaflet, the new MMR leaflet and the immunisation schedule in several languages.

These translated leaflets can be accessed on their website by clicking on ‘Health Professionals’ from the menu on the left and then clicking on ‘Childhood Leaflets Translated’.

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NEW IMMUNISATION GUIDELINES

The National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) is currently finalising the new Irish Immunisation Guidelines, which should be published later this year. The proposed new childhood immunisation schedule was announced at the National Immunisation Conference in Dublin in April. The main proposed changes to the schedule are as follows:

- The addition of Hepatitis B vaccine to the infant schedule. This will be given at 2, 4 and 6 months in combination with diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio and Hib, as a 6 in 1 injection.
- Addition of Pneumococcal vaccine at 2, 4 and 12 months.
- Hib booster to change from 12 months to 13 months
- Men C vaccine schedule to change to 4, 6 and 13 months
- Addition of low dose pertussis booster at 11-14 years.

While the NIAC has recommended these changes no date has yet been set for their implementation. These are major changes to the schedule and their implementation will require a planning process, including contracts for the relevant vaccines. We will keep you updated.

MEASLES CASES ASSOCIATED WITH TRAVELLING COMMUNITY IN UK AND NORWAY

As of 24th May 2007 the UK Health Protection Agency was aware of 20 confirmed cases of measles occurring in the traveller population. Several cases are linked to a traveller event in South East London over the Easter holidays and since then there has been a rise in cases of suspected measles in the traveller community across London, the East of England and the South East.

There have been at least 13 confirmed cases in London, 6 in the East of England and a single case in the South East. The cases, all in unvaccinated individuals and aged between 1 and 21 years, have been reported from many travellers' sites in these regions.

Norway has also reported an outbreak of 6 cases in members of the travelling community from England. This outbreak in Norway involved a number of families who had travelled to Norway from England, where they had previous contact with a case of measles.

In Cork and Kerry we have only received one notification of a possible measles case in the first 5 months of the year. In Ireland up to 19th May 2007, there have been 21 notifications of measles, but only 3 of these have been confirmed. This compares with 41 notifications in the same period in 2006. No outbreaks in the traveller community have been identified so far this year.

It is encouraging that public confidence in the MMR vaccine is returning, and coverage is increasing as a result. Coverage in Ireland among two year olds for the last quarter of 2006 was 86% (87% in Cork and Kerry), up from the lowest recorded figure of 69% in quarter 4 of 2001. This is an encouraging trend although much more remains to be done in order to ensure that all children are fully protected.

Parents should be reminded that it is never too late to get their child immunised with the MMR vaccine and that it is the most effective way to protect children against measles, mumps and rubella.

NEW MMR POSTER AND LEAFLET

An MMR campaign was recently organized by the National Immunisation Office, as part of European Immunisation week to promote MMR. A new MMR poster and parents leaflet has been produced and is available from your Local Health Office.