

Mumps outbreaks across England

Provisional data from Public Health England (PHE) show that there were 5,042 lab-confirmed cases of mumps in England in 2019, compared to 1,066 cases in 2018. This is the highest number of cases since 2009.

The rise in cases looks set to continue in 2020, with 546 confirmed cases in January 2020 compared to 191 during the same period in 2019.

The steep rise in cases in 2019 has been largely driven by outbreaks in universities and colleges. Many of the cases in 2019 were seen in the so-called 'Wakefield cohorts' – young adults born in the late nineties and early 2000s who missed out on the MMR vaccine when they were children. These cohorts are now old enough to attend college and university and are likely to continue fuelling outbreaks into 2020.

Mumps is a viral infection that used to be common in children before the introduction of the MMR vaccine.

It is most recognisable by the painful swelling of the glands at the side of the face, giving a person with mumps a distinctive 'hamster face' appearance. Other symptoms include headaches, joint pain and fever, which may develop a few days before the swelling. If you suspect that you or a family member has mumps, contact your GP.

Vaccination is the safest and most effective way to protect yourself from mumps. It prevents most, but not all, cases of mumps and even if a vaccinated person does get mumps, they will likely have a less severe illness than an unvaccinated person.

Dr Vanessa Saliba, Consultant Epidemiologist at Public Health England, said:

The best protection against mumps and its complications is to have 2 doses of the MMR vaccine. It's never too late to catch up.

We encourage all students and young people who may have missed out on their MMR vaccine in the past to contact their GP practice and get up to date as soon as possible.

Matt Hancock, Health Secretary said:

The rise in mumps cases is alarming and yet another example of the long-term damage caused by anti-vax information.

Science proves that vaccines are the best form of defence against a host of potentially deadly diseases and are safer and more effective than ever before. Those who claim otherwise are risking people's lives.

Our vaccine strategy will soon be published outlining how we will increase uptake, limit the spread of vaccine misinformation and ensure every child receives two doses of their MMR vaccination. Anyone who is unsure whether they are fully covered should contact their GP.

PHE and NHS England have recently launched an MMR catch-up programme for children aged 10 to 11 years old to ensure they are fully vaccinated if they missed out in childhood.

Although most people usually recover from mumps without treatment, in some cases it can cause complications such as inflammation of the testicles, and in rare cases, meningitis and deafness.