PRESS RELEASE

Joint Statement from the:
Faculty of Public Health Medicine
Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health
Public Health Medicine Environmental Group
Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association

Endorsing the Continued Use of the MMR Triple Vaccine

Our professional bodies represent the doctors and nurses who are responsible for the health care of children in the UK and for advising parents on how they can best protect their children from infection.

In January 2001 we issued a joint statement supporting the use of the triple vaccine MMR by parents. We and in particular our specialists on childhood infection have been continuing to monitor carefully all the relevant scientific data, and the uptake of vaccination.

We have seen no new evidence that would make us change our advice to parents. Indeed, two new authoritative and independent scientific reviews of all the available data by the UK’s Medical Research Council at <http://www.mrc.ac.uk/pdf-autism_report.pdf> and the American Academy of Pediatrics at <http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/107/5/e84> have found against there being an association between the MMR vaccine and autism, associated disorders or inflammatory bowel disease. The American review was asked its opinion on vaccine type and specifically advised against use of single vaccines.

Our organisations therefore continue to support the policy of the Department of Health and the World Health Organisation that parents should continue to immunise their children with the combined triple vaccine for Measles Mumps and Rubella (MMR).

There is a huge body of evidence that shows that the combined vaccine, which has been given to 500 million children worldwide in 90 countries, remains safe and effective. We note that no country in the world recommends use of single vaccines when MMR is available.

Some parents are requesting single vaccines, which are unproven in both safety and effectiveness. In contrast MMR is now probably the best researched vaccine worldwide and its few very rare side effects are well known. There has been little research conducted to ascertain whether single vaccines for measles, mumps and rubella could have significant side effects.
We do not believe that it is sensible to subject children to six injections without good reason – whilst prolonging the risk of exposure in the interim to those diseases which they are still waiting to be vaccinated against. Hence we cannot support use of single vaccines by parents when there is a safer, effective, well-researched alternative, the MMR vaccine.

Professor Sian Griffiths, President of the Faculty of Public Health Medicine speaking for the other professional bodies stated: “It is imperative that parents receive all of the facts so that they can make an informed choice that is in the best interests of their children. As health professionals concerned for the health of all children in the UK – we fully support the continued use of the MMR triple vaccine and this Government’s immunisation programme.”

Professor David Hall, President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, said: “The MMR vaccine was introduced because these diseases can be serious – the supposed link between MMR and autism is completely unsubstantiated whereas there is absolutely no doubt that the diseases themselves can cause brain damage – as I know from my own experience over the past 30 years.”

The latest data from the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, published in January, indicated that there had been a small recovery in uptake of MMR and that before the recent publicity over three quarters of parents were choosing MMR for their children by age 16 months with over four fifths having the vaccine by two years of age. <http://www.phls.co.uk/publications/CDR%20Weekly/archive02/News/news0202.html#MMR>

This recovery will now be prejudiced by the current publicity. Even so, levels are too low and, as we have seen in recent days, the UK is at a much higher risk of outbreaks of measles, mumps and rubella (German measles) if children remain unprotected – which will lead to unnecessary suffering among both parents and children. Three children died in the recent Dublin measles outbreak and inevitably there will be some deaths and handicapped children if the levels of uptake of the MMR vaccine do not improve.

06.02.02

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