

**Yr Athro/Professor Chris Jones CBE**

Cyfarwyddwr Clinigol Cenedlaethol, GIG Cymru  
a Dirprwy Brif Swyddog Meddygol  
National Clinical Director, NHS Wales and Deputy Chief Medical Officer



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Directors of Education  
Local Authorities

Dear Colleagues,

You may be aware of the widespread concern caused by the ongoing outbreaks of measles in the West Midlands and other parts of England. Although we do not have any current cases in Wales, a small outbreak in Cardiff in October led to around 50 children being asked to isolate and not attend school for over two weeks.

Measles is a highly infectious and serious disease. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that a person infected with measles can infect 9 out of 10 of their unvaccinated contacts. It can be transmitted for four days before the onset of the rash. The current outbreaks in England mean there is a significantly heightened risk of cases and outbreaks occurring in Wales. A measles outbreak can have serious consequences for public health and be highly disruptive to education settings.

The disease can be prevented by vaccination and the success of the MMR vaccination programme over recent decades allowed the UK to reach a position in 2017 where the disease was briefly considered by the WHO to have been eliminated. However, the UK has never met the WHO target of 95% uptake of 2 doses of MMR by the age of 5, which is needed to achieve and maintain elimination status, and so endemic transmission has been reestablished here.

The most recent Wales wide vaccination uptake figures show 88.9% of five-year-olds had received the full 2-dose course of MMR. By school year 11 this figure is 91.4%. I am concerned that there is now a substantial proportion of our school age population at risk of contracting and transmitting measles.

I am particularly concerned about the significant geographical variation in uptake as even in a highly vaccinated population pockets can emerge where outbreaks could take hold. School level MMR coverage surveillance reports show some schools with high or very high rates of vaccination amongst their pupils, whilst other schools have lower uptake rates. Previous experience of measles outbreaks shows that schools with low uptake are particularly vulnerable to the threat of sustained transmission within the school setting, potentially becoming a source of breakout transmission into the wider community.

A measles outbreak in a school will cause significant disruption. Infected children will be required to isolate and pupils who are un/under vaccinated are likely to be asked



to stay away from face-to-face learning for up to 21 days (the potential incubation period for the disease).

To mitigate this threat, I have recently [written](#) to health boards asking them to ensure that:

- By 31 July 2024, every school in Wales with 50 pupils or more on roll has 90% of its pupils recorded as having received two doses of MMR for pupils of reception age and above; and
- Where this has not been achieved, the health board will be required to document the reasons why it hasn't been possible and set out further steps which will be taken to achieve it.

To further bolster the resilience of these schools against measles, I have also asked health boards that, where possible, they should vaccinate staff who are un/under vaccinated or who are unsure of their immunity status.

In order to effectively provide this extra protection for pupils and schools, health boards will require the co-operation and collaboration of local authorities and individual schools. I am, therefore, asking that you offer your full support to health boards to enable this vital catch-up activity over the coming months. I am mindful of the administration and disruption this may cause and so am grateful to you in advance for your support.

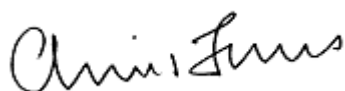
Many schools in Wales will not be contacted as part of this targeted approach to catch-up. However, it is vital that every family understands the threat to their child and to the wider school community of not being vaccinated. I would also, ask for your support in encouraging parents to check their child's vaccination status and where a child has not been vaccinated to arrange an appointment as soon as possible.

Public Health Wales is producing a suite of resources to support schools in the event of a measles outbreak. These can be accessed [here](#) and will be kept up to date.

I would like to acknowledge the additional burden to already busy schools, which this catch-up activity may represent. However, I know like me, you will want to do everything possible to protect both the health and education of our young people.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to you and to school staff across Wales for your support.

Yn gywir/Yours sincerely



**YR ATHRO/PROFESSOR CHRIS JONES CBE**