

## Wales sets up drop-in vaccination clinics to tackle measles outbreak

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Health authorities in Wales have stepped up their drive to vaccinate more children against measles in a bid to bring the outbreak in Swansea under control.

Thousands of children have been given the combined measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine over the past two weekends in general practices and special drop-in clinics across south Wales set up by health boards to tackle the surge in cases.

Vaccination teams have been sent out to begin a targeted MMR campaign in schools this week, beginning with five comprehensive schools in Swansea and Neath Port Talbot.

As the *BMJ* went to press on Tuesday, 693 cases of measles had been reported in the Swansea area since November 2012 (figure 1), including a cluster of 73 cases in just two days last week.<sup>1</sup>

The Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board, which is coordinating the vaccination programme, said that it aimed to reach over 2000 children and teenagers during this first week of the schools campaign and would target more schools in the weeks ahead.

Public Health Wales said more than 2600 MMR vaccinations were carried out in Swansea alone in the first week of the special vaccination drive, 900 in general practices and around 1700 at the drop-in clinics, which took place on 6 April.

The health board said that a further 1700 MMR vaccinations were given in a second set of drop-in clinics in Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, and Bridgend on 13 April, and further clinics are planned this weekend (20 April).

School age children who missed their scheduled MMR vaccinations are the primary target for vaccination, but the health board has also urged patients to consider vaccination of babies aged 6-12 months and children up to 3 years, 4 months who were now eligible for their second MMR jab.

Adults worried that they may not have immunity have also been encouraged to consider vaccination, particularly if they are a carer or work with children or in health services.

Sara Hayes, director of public health at the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board, said, "I cannot stress enough how important it is for people to have their MMR. The number of cases and people being hospitalised with measles is continuing to rise, and we can only stop it by protecting those we can against it."

Ruth Hussey, chief medical officer for Wales, said, "I urge parents and carers of children who have not had the vaccination to arrange for them to receive it.

"I am pleased to see that so many children and young people attended the extra vaccination clinics over the weekend, but there are still thousands of children who have not had both doses of the MMR jab and so are still at risk from becoming infected with measles."

Hussey added, "The more serious complications of measles are pneumonia or encephalitis, which is an inflammation of the brain. MMR vaccination offers the only protection against contracting the disease."

In January an outbreak of measles in northeast England saw more than 100 confirmed or suspected cases and 29 patients needing hospital treatment.<sup>2</sup>

1 Public Health Wales. Vaccination plea continues as measles cases in Swansea outbreak at almost 700. [www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/news/26725](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/news/26725).

2 Wise J. Measles outbreak hits northeast England. *BMJ* 2013;346:f662.

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## Figure

