

# 'Measles vaccine is safe'

## Having second jab not harmful, parents told

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**PETALING JAYA:** Parents have been advised not to worry about their children having second doses of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine as it will not have adverse effects.

A Health Ministry officer said a second dose of the MMR vaccine was compulsory under the ministry's two-dose policy implemented in 2002.

"Previously, parents were only required to ensure that their children receive one dose of measles vaccine at the age of nine months," he said when contacted yesterday.

In the past, vaccines for measles, mumps and rubella were given separately and parents could opt to have their children vaccinated and given second doses at private clinics.

The officer, stationed at the ministry's Measles Operations Room, said the ministry had adopted the two-dose policy under World Health Organisation recommendations.

He was asked to comment on a statement by the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) on its concern over children receiving multiple doses of the MMR vaccine.

CAP had urged authorities to carry out a proper evaluation before conducting its Mass Measles Immunisation Campaign.

More than 4.5 million school children aged between seven and 15 will be immunised beginning this month until July under this campaign.

The immunisations are a preventive measure against an outbreak of measles expected to occur next year or in 2006.

CAP also said studies from abroad showed that measles continued to occur even among children who had been fully vaccinated.

It stated that soon after the vaccine was in use, there was a new problem where children contracted atypical measles, a more serious form of the disease that might not respond to treatment.

The ministry's officer said children with records of having received a second dose of the MMR vaccine could be considered for exemption from the campaign.

He said that if parents had records of their children's immunisation schedules, they could arrange for exemption with the immunisation teams stationed at the schools.

"Our intention under this campaign is to immunise all children but we will consider each child on a case-by-case basis to reassure parents," he said when contacted yesterday.

Asked how the ministry would ensure all the children were immunised, he said the ministry had informed parents about this campaign through the schools.

"We have been preparing for this campaign for the past two years by providing education in schools to create awareness on the importance of immunisation," he said.

On reports of a current nationwide measles outbreak, he said there was no outbreak but the Kuala Lumpur Hospital had recorded a high number of admissions due to measles.

It was reported that the hospital had received 270 measles cases since last September, and a measles ward had been set up to cope with the cases.

In a statement, Malaysian Medical Association president Datuk Dr N. Arumugam said it was not necessary for children who had received a second dose of measles vaccine to be involved in this mass campaign.

"It will not benefit these children," he said.

### Facts on measles



#### What is measles?

- A highly contagious virus, found throughout the world and attacks mainly children.
- It is a leading cause of death in children worldwide.

#### How serious is measles?

- Each year there are 30 million reported cases, with 875,000 deaths.
- In Malaysia, the previous 1999/2000 outbreak caused 10 deaths.
- Since September 2002, there has been 270 admissions at the Pediatric Institute of Hospital Kuala Lumpur with eight cases suffering serious lung damage and two deaths.



#### Symptoms

- Can cause severe breathing difficulties, eye infection, ear infection, pneumonia, severe diarrhea and rashes on the face, neck and body (pic).
- In more serious cases, it causes brain infection, brain damage and even death.
- Infection during pregnancy can cause the death or early birth of the baby.
- Initial symptoms are tiredness and exhaustion, irritability, high fever, teary eyes with swollen eyelids, dislike of light and cough and cold symptoms.



#### Duration

- Contagious four days before and four days after the rashes appears.
- The average time between exposure to the virus and the development of symptoms is 10 to 14 days.

#### Treatment

- No specific treatment. Patients are advised to drink a lot of water.
- Prevention by vaccine only.

#### Prevention

- The MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine, a combination of three vaccines in one injection is commonly used today.



#### Is the MMR vaccine safe?

- Malaysia had implemented a two-dose policy in 2002.
- The MMR vaccine is given to children between nine and 12 months old and again when they are seven.
- The MMR is a safe vaccine with minor side effects of mild pain, swelling or fever, which may occur from the day of injection up to five to seven days.



Source: Society Guardian, WHO, Pediatric Department of HKL, Medical Tribune

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