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Dear Parents and Carers,

Is your child protected against measles, flu, and other infectious diseases?

As the school term starts up again, I am writing to ensure that your family is fully protected through vaccinations and ready to take on the school year without the risk of serious illness or the need to self-isolate.

Flu vaccination for children

Children can catch and spread flu easily. Last year 6,000 under 5s ended up in hospital because of flu. The child flu vaccine reduces a child's chance of needing hospital care for flu by around two-thirds. Vaccinating them also protects others who are vulnerable to flu, such as babies and older people.

The flu vaccine is offered to children each year in school. The 2023 flu season in Australia's winter (July 2023) is the largest on record, with children under the age of 16 being the most affected. Based on this data, experts can usually predict a similar picture in our flu season here in the UK – which is why we are urging parents to ensure their children come forward for the flu vaccine now.

You will have already received an e-consent form, that I urge you to complete and submit as soon as you can so that your child does not miss out on their vaccination. The flu vaccination will be offered to your child as a quick and painless spray up the nose in the Autumn term by the immunisation team at your child's school. Children who cannot have the nasal spray for medical reasons will be offered a vaccination by injection.

The flu vaccination is also offered to children aged 2 and 3 years old, simply book an appointment with their GP.

Measles is circulating

Measles continues to be of increasing concern, as cases continue to rise in neighbouring boroughs and numbers of vaccinated children in Barnet remain well below the target needed to prevent an outbreak.

Current figures show that only 72% of under 5s in Barnet are fully vaccinated against measles. This is worryingly below the 95% that is needed to prevent an outbreak, as set by the World Health Organisation.

If your child is not up to date with routine vaccination against measles, you may receive a phone call from our immunisation team to invite you to book an appointment, but **you do not need to wait for a call to come forward.**

The possibility of a major measles outbreak in Barnet will continue to grow unless MMR vaccination rates improve. We urge you to please make sure your family is up to date with their MMR vaccinations to avoid serious illness and stop a measles outbreak from happening in London.

What is measles?

Measles is a highly contagious disease and can lead to complications such as ear infections, pneumonia, and inflammation of the brain which require hospitalisation and on rare occasions can lead to long term disability or death. Spending 15 minutes or more in direct contact with someone infected with measles is enough to catch the infection.

People whose immunity is compromised, pregnant women and unvaccinated children are at increased risk of severe disease. Measles symptoms to be aware of include:

- High fever
- Sore, watery red eyes
- Coughing
- Aching, and feeling generally unwell
- A blotchy red brown rash, which usually appears after the initial symptoms.

Any child identified as a close contact of a measles case without satisfactory vaccination status may be asked to self-isolate for up to 21 days. Children who are vaccinated do not need to be excluded from school or childcare.

Measles and flu are both **diseases that we know can be prevented by vaccines**. When children do not have the protection provided by routine childhood vaccinations, these diseases can easily spread among unvaccinated children.

Make sure your child is up to date with their vaccinations:

If you're unsure your child is due for vaccination or would like to know more, you can:

- Check your child's 'Red Book' to check their vaccination status
- Contact the school immunisation team on 0208 447 3622
- Contact your child's GP
- Call the free NHS helpline 111

If your child has missed any routine childhood vaccinations, book an appointment with the immunisation team or with their GP to catch up.

I wish your child, your family and you a happy and healthy start to the new school year.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Tamara Djuretic
Joint Director of Public Health and Prevention
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Further information – website links:

- For more information, visit www.nhs.uk/vaccinations or [4-in-1 pre-school booster overview](#)
- This [pre-school immunisation booklet](#) is a guide to the pre-school immunisations children need from two years old until starting primary school.
- For more information on routine childhood vaccinations, check here: www.ncihealthandcare.org.uk/keeping-well/baby-and-childhood-vaccinations