# England faces surge in measles cases amid winter with low vaccine coverage in children



As winter approaches, health authorities in England are raising urgent warnings about a resurgence of measles, a highly contagious virus that poses significant risks, especially to children. Despite being easily preventable with the MMR vaccine, the virus continues to affect a substantial number of people, with more than 770 laboratory-confirmed cases reported since the start of 2025. Public health officials stress the importance of vaccination and catching up on missed doses as the season's indoor conditions and the new school term contribute to the spread.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has highlighted that the virus thrives during colder months due to people spending more time indoors in close proximity, thus accelerating transmission. This seasonality effect, combined with children returning to school, creates a fertile environment for outbreaks. The London and North West regions have been particularly affected, though data show outbreaks have begun to decline following a summer spike. Nonetheless, officials remain vigilant about the potential for further increases as winter progresses.

Measles can cause serious complications such as pneumonia and meningitis if the infection spreads beyond the initial symptoms. The MMR vaccine, offered free through the NHS, provides robust protection. It is administered in two doses, typically at one year and again at around three years and four months old. The UKHSA and NHS England have been emphasizing the need for parents and guardians to ensure children receive both doses. Yet, vaccination coverage remains insufficient in some areas, leaving a significant number of children vulnerable.

Recent government data reveal that more than 10% of children under five in England have not received the full MMR vaccination. This gap increases the risk of outbreaks in settings like nurseries and schools where children are in close contact. For example, NHS England Midlands reported that nearly a quarter of children starting school were not fully protected against measles. This is particularly concerning given ongoing outbreaks in urban centres such as Coventry, Birmingham, Leicester, London, and Greater Manchester.

The situation has prompted urgent calls from health officials. The UKHSA’s Chief Executive warned earlier this year that without increased vaccination efforts, measles outbreaks could expand further. The agency has urged parents of infants who missed vaccinations as well as unvaccinated individuals of all ages to come forward for the vaccine. The warning is underscored by data showing that most recent measles cases are in children under 10, including several who had received only one dose or, in rare cases, even two doses, highlighting the importance of maintaining high vaccination coverage.

Travel-related risks have also been a concern, with the UKHSA cautioning that holiday periods can contribute to surges in cases. Parents are advised to ensure children are vaccinated before travelling to reduce importation and spread of the virus. Furthermore, with the new school term underway, health authorities are urging parents to prioritise vaccine catch-up appointments to prevent further increases.

According to official statistics, measles outbreaks remain a pressing public health issue in England during 2025. The combination of low vaccine uptake in some areas, seasonal factors, and close contact environments creates a recurring challenge. Authorities continue to remind the public that measles is preventable, that vaccines are safe and effective, and timely vaccination remains the best defence.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2120757/contagious-virus-alert-winter-england), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/measles-outbreaks-continue-with-risk-of-holidays-causing-surge)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2120757/contagious-virus-alert-winter-england), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/measles-mumps-and-rubella-lab-confirmed-cases-in-england-2025/laboratory-confirmed-cases-of-measles-rubella-and-mumps-in-england-april-to-june-2025), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/latest-data-shows-measles-cases-remain-high)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2120757/contagious-virus-alert-winter-england), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/measles-outbreak-could-spread-warns-ukhsa-chief-executive), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vaccine-update-issue-361-july-2025/vaccine-update-issue-361-july-2025)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.england.nhs.uk/midlands/2025/08/28/a-quarter-of-children-starting-school-are-unprotected-from-measles/), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vaccine-update-issue-361-july-2025/vaccine-update-issue-361-july-2025)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/measles-outbreak-could-spread-warns-ukhsa-chief-executive), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/measles-mumps-and-rubella-lab-confirmed-cases-in-england-2025/laboratory-confirmed-cases-of-measles-rubella-and-mumps-in-england-april-to-june-2025), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/latest-data-shows-measles-cases-remain-high)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/measles-outbreaks-continue-with-risk-of-holidays-causing-surge), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/measles-outbreak-could-spread-warns-ukhsa-chief-executive), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/latest-data-shows-measles-cases-remain-high)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2120757/contagious-virus-alert-winter-england), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/measles-outbreak-could-spread-warns-ukhsa-chief-executive), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/measles-mumps-and-rubella-lab-confirmed-cases-in-england-2025/laboratory-confirmed-cases-of-measles-rubella-and-mumps-in-england-april-to-june-2025), [[5]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vaccine-update-issue-361-july-2025/vaccine-update-issue-361-july-2025), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/latest-data-shows-measles-cases-remain-high), [[7]](https://www.england.nhs.uk/midlands/2025/08/28/a-quarter-of-children-starting-school-are-unprotected-from-measles/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2120757/contagious-virus-alert-winter-england> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/measles-outbreak-could-spread-warns-ukhsa-chief-executive> - In January 2024, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Chief Executive warned that measles outbreaks could spread unless urgent action was taken to increase MMR vaccination uptake in high-risk areas. Measles, a highly contagious disease, can spread easily among unvaccinated individuals, especially in nurseries and schools. The MMR vaccine is part of the NHS Routine Childhood Immunisation Programme, with one dose offered at one year and another at 3 years 4 months. Parents whose infants missed out, or anyone of any age who has not yet had a vaccine, are urged to come forward. The free MMR vaccine is a safe and effective way of protecting against measles, as well as mumps and rubella.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/measles-mumps-and-rubella-lab-confirmed-cases-in-england-2025/laboratory-confirmed-cases-of-measles-rubella-and-mumps-in-england-april-to-june-2025> - Between April and June 2025, there were 364 laboratory-confirmed cases of measles reported in England, an increase of 138 compared to the previous quarter. The cases were mainly linked to outbreaks in London, the North West, and East of England. Of the 364 cases, 73.4% were in children aged 10 years or younger. Eight cases were previously vaccinated with one dose of the MMR vaccine, and five with at least two doses. The data highlights the importance of maintaining high vaccination coverage to prevent outbreaks.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/measles-outbreaks-continue-with-risk-of-holidays-causing-surge> - In June 2025, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) reported continued measles outbreaks, with 109 cases confirmed in April and 86 in May. The majority of cases were in unvaccinated children aged 10 years and under, with London reporting almost half of all cases in the past four weeks. The UKHSA expressed concern that travel during the summer holidays could lead to a surge in measles cases, urging parents to ensure their children are vaccinated before traveling.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vaccine-update-issue-361-july-2025/vaccine-update-issue-361-july-2025> - In July 2025, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) highlighted that more than 1 in 10 eligible children under the age of 5 in England hadn't had the MMR vaccine or were only partially vaccinated. This leaves these children unprotected and increases the risk of measles outbreaks in nurseries and schools. The UKHSA reminded parents and guardians to ensure their children are protected by taking up two doses of the MMR vaccine at the right time.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/latest-data-shows-measles-cases-remain-high> - In July 2025, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) reported that measles activity had increased since April 2025, with an additional 145 cases reported since the last publication. Cases predominantly affected children under the age of 10, with London and parts of the North West driving the increase. The UKHSA urged parents to prioritise vaccine catch-up appointments during the summer break, expressing concerns about a further surge once the new school term begins.
7. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/midlands/2025/08/28/a-quarter-of-children-starting-school-are-unprotected-from-measles/> - In August 2025, NHS England Midlands reported that almost a quarter of children starting school for the first time were not fully protected against measles. Of the 120,622 children starting school, 28,405 remained unprotected. This is despite measles outbreaks in Coventry, Birmingham, and Leicester in 2024, and continuing cases in London and Greater Manchester. The NHS urged parents and carers to contact their GP surgery and book an MMR vaccination appointment to ensure children starting school have the protection they need.