

## Media release

16 July 2024

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### Parents encouraged to find out more about NHS vaccines for children and babies

Parents in north east London are being encouraged to find out more about vaccinations for babies and children to help give their family "the brightest and healthiest start in life".

NHS North East London (NHS NEL) has launched a new campaign – Bright Start in Life – in collaboration with local councils to ensure pregnant women and parents in all boroughs have access to all the information they need on childhood and maternity vaccinations.

The campaign is encouraging any parent with questions about the vaccines available, or who wants to better understand the vital protections they provide, to come forward for information and advice – or arrange a conversation with their GP, midwife or health visitor.

Getting vaccinated is a normal part of growing up in the UK and keeping a child up to date with their vaccines is the best way to protect them against serious diseases such as polio, meningitis, measles, mumps and rubella, and prevent them spreading in the community.

However, thousands of children aged five and under across north east London are yet to receive free NHS vaccinations that boost their immunity against serious illness.

Among these are more than 19,000 under-fives who have not received a single dose of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine – including around 4,300 in City of London and Hackney, 3,300 in Redbridge, 3,200 in Newham, 2,300 in Tower Hamlets, 2,200 in both Barking and Dagenham and Waltham Forest, and more than 1,600 in Havering.

Recent figures published by the UK Health Security Agency show measles cases have been rising in some regions – including London – and that five babies have died from whooping cough in England this year amid an ongoing increase in infections.

This coincides with a national fall in MMR vaccine coverage, and a steady decline in uptake of the six-in-one vaccine among two-year-olds and the maternal pertussis vaccine, offered during pregnancy, which both provide protection against whooping cough.

Parents with questions, or keen to learn more, are being encouraged to:

- Get their vaccine and health information from trusted sources, such as the NHS or the World Health Organisation. NHS North East London has launched [a new online vaccinations hub](#) which has full details of vaccines available for children and babies.
- Speak to their GP, health visitor or midwife for expert advice and information to help them decide which vaccines are right for them and their family.

**Dr Muhammad Naqvi, a local GP and clinical lead for vaccinations at NHS North East London, said:** "We know that vaccines are safe and prevent millions of deaths worldwide every year, including here in the UK, so getting vaccinated is the best thing you can do to protect yourself and your children against many serious, potentially deadly diseases.

“But we also understand that vaccination is a personal choice and some people need more information to help them make the right decision for themselves or their families. That’s why our campaign is encouraging people to have conversations with a local health professional.

"If you're a parent or a prospective parent and you'd like to know more about the vaccines available during pregnancy or childhood, please visit our vaccinations webpage for information or get in touch with your GP, health visitor or midwife for advice. Ensuring your child is fully vaccinated will help give them the brightest and healthiest start in life."

**Gladys Xavier, Director of Public Health for the London Borough of Redbridge, said:** "We have seen first-hand in Redbridge that when our residents are presented with the facts around vaccinations, from local healthcare professionals they know and trust, they make informed decisions that put their children first.

"The public health team at Redbridge work with partners across the NHS and in our communities to ensure our families have access to the right information when they need it."

**Dr Sandra Husbands, Director of Public Health for Hackney and the City, said:** "The health of your children is every parent’s top priority and protecting them from serious disease is incredibly important.

"The best way for parents to protect their children from serious diseases is by ensuring they are up to date with their vaccinations and that is why I would encourage every parent to be informed and to find out more about childhood immunisations.

"A range of vaccinations are available including halal and kosher options. Anyone with any questions should speak to their GP or health visitor who will be happy to address any concerns and guide people through the vaccination schedule."

**Helen Fentimen, Chair of the City of London Corporation’s Community and Children’s Services Committee, said:** "Ensuring your child is fully vaccinated is a crucial step in protecting them from life-threatening diseases.

"Maternity and childhood vaccinations provide immunity, giving your family a better chance for a healthy future. Don't hesitate to seek advice and make an informed choice for your child's wellbeing."

**Councillor Gillian Ford, Deputy Leader of Havering Council and Cabinet Member for Adults and Wellbeing, said:** "Having had three children, I can appreciate the importance of keeping healthy during pregnancy and ensuring children are given the best start in life.

"NHS vaccination programmes for babies and children are there to protect against potentially deadly diseases, I encourage parents to discuss child vaccinations with their local health professional so we can collectively keep our children protected."

**Joe McDonnell, Director of Public Health for Waltham Forest, said:** "This will be a really important campaign for Waltham Forest’s Public Health team and all our health partners. Looking at the sharply rising numbers with measles and whooping cough (Pertussis) in London this year, we are concerned that the declining rate of maternal and early years

vaccination is putting more children at risk, and we recognise that many of the traditional methods of promoting vaccines need to be refined.

"Our residents want to feel heard, and they want to build trusting relationships with medical professionals, and that's what this campaign will help deliver. Above all, the cross-borough work will encourage teams to share resources as well as vital learnings."

**Lutfur Rahman, Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets, said:** "We want to empower parents and carers in making informed choices about their children's health, gaining the knowledge they need to feel supported and confident in their decisions.

"This ultimately reduces the pressure on the NHS, social care and other public services and enables people to live longer, healthier lives."

**Councillor Maureen Worby, Cabinet Member of Social Care and Health Integration for Barking and Dagenham, said:** "I encourage you to check that your child is up to date with their immunisations before the summer holidays and school's start in September.

"We know that there are many busy working families in Barking and Dagenham and we are working with our health partners to make it as easy and convenient as possible to get their children vaccinated by offering monthly MMR community clinics at convenient locations and times.

"Even if your child might be older, they can catch up with any immunisations that they may have missed as a baby or toddler. Diseases like measles are highly contagious and can be very dangerous and it's never too late to have your child vaccinated."

**Jason Strelitz, Corporate Director of Adults and Health, Newham Council, said:** "Ensuring you and your children are vaccinated, at the right time, offers the best protection. We recognise parents want to make informed decisions and this is why the council has been working with the NHS to produce a series of videos providing specific information about each jab. You'll soon see them in your local community.

"It is of course best to have vaccines on time, but you can still catch up on most if you miss them. Simply contact your GP practice to check if you've had your vaccinations, or if you have any questions or concerns.

"Getting vaccinated can also help protect other people in your community so, by being proactive, we can ensure Newham is a healthier place to live."

More information on vaccines for children and babies, including how to arrange a vaccination and keep your child's immunisations up to date, is available on the NHS North East London website at [www.northeastlondon.icb.nhs.uk/BrightStart](http://www.northeastlondon.icb.nhs.uk/BrightStart).

**-ENDS-**

## Notes to editors:

- **Photo captions:** Getting vaccinated is the best thing you can do to protect yourself and your children against many serious, potentially deadly diseases. *Photo credit: NHS NEL*
- **NHS North East London** serves more than two million people across eight local authority areas: Barking and Dagenham, City of London, Hackney, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. It is responsible for planning and buying health services across north east London to meet its population's needs, making sure all parts of the local health system work effectively together. For more information about NHS North East London, visit [www.northeastlondon.icb.nhs.uk/](http://www.northeastlondon.icb.nhs.uk/)
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