

Supplement to the agenda

Health and Wellbeing Board

Monday 11 March 2024, 2.00 pm

Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE

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PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD – 11 March 2024

Question 1

Ann Russell, Hereford

Do Herefordshire Council have any plans to add fluoride to the public water supply? I am concerned about recent evidence linking fluoride exposure, even at low levels, to potential neurodevelopmental harm, especially during pregnancy and early childhood. A current federal trial in the US is shedding light on these health risks and the lack of informed consent regarding water fluoridation. Given the lack of evidence supporting its dental health benefits, I strongly urge Herefordshire Council to thoroughly consider these emerging health concerns before proceeding with any plans to add fluoride to the water supply. It is vital that the council refrains from subjecting residents to unnecessary health risks without their informed consent. Additionally, it is worth noting that fluoridation is often seen as a method of disposing of hazardous industrial waste.

Response

Thank you for your question.

The standard of children's oral health in Herefordshire is poorer than both the regional and national average with over a third (38%) of 5-year olds experiencing preventable tooth decay in 2021/22.

Work to address poor oral health in Herefordshire is overseen by the Oral Health Improvement board which involves a comprehensive action plan working with a wide range of partners to tackle the causes of poor oral health. This includes a specific action around fluoridation in water.

There have been multiple evidence reviews from around the world that have consistently found that levels of tooth decay are lower in fluoridated areas and that there is no credible scientific evidence that at permitted levels of water fluoridation is harmful to health.

Following legislative changes in 2022/23 the powers and responsibility to expand community water fluoridation schemes now sit with the Secretary of State through the Health and Care Act 2022 and associated regulations. Subsequently, central Government has responsibility for new schemes including expansion of existing arrangements and identification of funding. Should Herefordshire Health and Wellbeing Board decide to pursue fluoridation in water, a full public consultation of the local population is an early requirement of feasibility considerations.

COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD – 11 March 2024

Question 1

Councillor Robert Highfield, Castle

The UK is suffering from a measles epidemic and the West Midlands is the worst hit. Herefordshire’s inoculation rate is close to the 95% required for group immunity, but we cannot be sure there are not localised areas with weak immunity where the disease could break out.

What contingency plans does the council have in the event of a local outbreak?

Response

Thank you for your question.

Our contingencies are two-fold. For prevention: we’re trying to increase vaccination rates to prevent cases and outbreaks in the first place, and for response to cases or outbreaks; we’re reminding partners of the correct notification routes and support available from the UK Health Security Agency to limit the spread of disease.

Outbreak prevention

Herefordshire’s measles vaccination rates are around 93% and we want them to be above 95%. As a result there will be pockets of people who are not vaccinated and they are the most likely to catch, spread and be made significantly ill from this highly contagious disease.

We have been working hard with schools, nurseries, parents and GPs since January to try to get our vaccination rates above the 95% level. This is important because not only does it help prevent measles in those who have had the jab, it also significantly reduces the chance that measles will spread to those who haven’t had the jab, or can’t have the jab, because of underlying medical conditions, infants under 1, or pregnant women.

Outbreak response

In terms of response, we’ve also been reminding our partners of what measles symptoms to look out for and how to notify the right authorities for help limit the spread. So far Herefordshire has not had a measles case linked to the regional outbreak. If we did, measles is a notifiable disease, so all individual cases are reported to the UK Health Security Agency directly via a healthcare professional.

An outbreak is defined as two or more cases linked in time or place, such as two or more children catching the disease while at school at the same time. In such cases, there are routine protocols (as with many infectious diseases) for measles cases and outbreak management that include risk assessment, contact tracing and in some cases individual or mass vaccination offers or preventative treatments. These activities are led by the UKHSA. In more complex or larger outbreaks, partnership incident management team meetings are called that include the local authority and other partners who can aide UKHSA in their outbreak management efforts.

