

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.