

Castle Buildings, Stormont, Belfast BT4 3PP

****URGENT MESSAGE****

HSS(MD)1/2001

To: All General Practitioners
All Community Pharmacists
Directors of Public Health
Consultants in Communicable Disease Control of HSS Boards
Directors of Nursing of HSS Boards
Directors of Pharmaceutical Services of HSS Boards and CSA
Medical Directors of HSS Trusts
Nursing Directors of HSS Trusts – for distribution to Health Visitors and
Treatment Room Nurses
Directors of Pharmaceutical Services of HSS Trusts
Regional Epidemiologist, CDSC(NI)

12 January 2001

Dear Colleague

Update on MMR Vaccine

Following recent publicity about MMR vaccine and the availability of single antigen vaccines, the Chairmen of the two relevant independent committees have issued the following advice.

The Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) has conducted a further detailed review of the safety data and the Chairman, Professor Alasdair Breckenridge said: “MMR vaccine is very safe. There is no question mark whatever over its licensing”.

Professor Michael Langman, Chairman of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation said: “My committee has independently considered all the issues and reached the same position as CSM. If there is a question mark, it is over the advice to have single vaccines.”

We are very pleased to have this further confirmation from the two independent expert committees that the safety record of MMR is excellent. The safety of combined MMR is supported by a much greater body of evidence than the individual vaccines. The suggested practice of giving staggered doses of separate components has not had its safety or efficacy tested.

Scare stories clearly worry parents but giving children six separate vaccines unnecessarily exposes them to the risk of life-threatening infection. MMR remains the safest way to protect our children

Much of the press reporting has been based on an as yet unpublished paper by Wakefield and Montgomery. We believe the paper will be published on 21 January 2001. When the final paper appears we will be writing to you with further information to deal with any new concerns that publication might raise. Whenever the final article appears a response will be found on each of the following web sites: www.immunisation.org.uk,
www.doh.gov.uk, or
www.open.gov.uk/mca

Contact: Dr Elizabeth Mitchell 028 90520716 for any further questions about immunisation policy; and Dr June Raine 020 7273 0400 for any questions about licensing issues.

Yours sincerely

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DR H CAMPBELL
Chief Medical Officer

MISS J HILL
Chief Nursing Officer

DR N MORROW
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

cc Chief Executives of HSS Boards and Trusts
GP Medical Advisers of HSS Boards
Prescribing Advisers of HSS Boards
Regional Drug and Poisons Information Service
Pharmaceutical Contractors Committee
General Practitioners Committee, BMA, Northern Ireland
Regional Advisory Committee on Communicable Disease Control