

Scheduling and timing of pre-school booster vaccinations

The Screening and Immunisation Team has been investigating discrepancies in published quarterly immunisation statistics for the pre-school booster and MMR.

The apparent discrepancy between the lower coverage of the pre-school booster compared with MMR, even though they are mostly given at the same time, appears to be due to the fact that the COVER definitions do not count any vaccinations given before the child is 3 years and 4 months of age. (The rationale for this is set out below for information.) All vaccinations, regardless of when given, are recorded on the Child Health Information System.

The number of pre-school boosters given before the age of 3 years and 4 months is likely to vary across the South West and so the impact of this issue on routine COVER data will vary. A local audit in one area of the South West has shown that this issue dropped the published pre-school booster coverage figures by up to 4%. We know how much hard work goes into delivering all immunisation programmes and it is important to try to ensure that the published data reflects this work.

We have discussed the rationale for the various clinical and data cut-offs with the national immunisation team and they are very clear that the scheduling of the pre-school booster by Child Health Record Departments (CHRD) and by GP practices (if not part of Child Health centralised call-recall arrangements) must be done to ensure that vaccination is done from 3 years 4 months of age **and not before**.

The SIT is currently working with the CHRDs to ensure that all system parameters are set up to ensure the children are being scheduled at the correct time.

We would be very grateful for the support of GP practices to ensure that children are not booked in for appointments for their pre-school booster before they are 3 years and 4 months of age. Any variance even by one day will mean that this vaccination is not captured in the routine coverage figures. We understand that there will be occasions when the practice needs to opportunistically immunise a child if it is felt that the family may not represent to the practice, but it is hoped that these are not frequent cases.

National rationale for scheduling of the pre-school booster from the age of 3 years and 4 months

- The national vaccination schedule is chosen to optimise protection across the whole population
- The pre-school booster from the age of 3 years and 4 months is timed to ensure that protection will last until school year 10 (or later if the teenage booster is delayed)
- The time between primary and booster vaccines increases the size of the booster response and if the booster is given later then protection will last longer
- The pre-school booster is already given very early in this country compared with other countries, so giving it even earlier is not acceptable except in exceptional circumstances
- Variation in the timing of the vaccination outside of the national recommendation undermines the national programmes.