

Increase in Measles Cases due to MMR Controversy

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The amount of people suffering from measles went up a colossal third last year - which brings it to the highest total since people began recording numbers of those with the condition.

In England and Wales last year a total of 1,348 people were recorded to contract the disease - that is 36 per cent more than the year before.

The Health Protection Agency (HPA), which published the figures, revealed that 50 per cent of cases (662) of the potentially deadly illness occurred in London - an area where the Measles, Mumps and Rubella vaccination is used the least. The number made a new record for measles cases in Britain's capital city - records of the disease were started in 1995.

The most recent figures available for September 2008 showed that across the country, 88.3 per cent of children have received their first Measles, Mumps and Rubella jab by 14 months of age, while 76.3 per cent have had their second dose by the time they are five. However, in the capital, vaccination rates are as low as 29.9 per cent (in Hackney) - much lower than the rest of Britain. In two out of three boroughs, less than 70 per cent of children have been given both doses, while in eight boroughs - Brent, Hackney, Hammersmith, Hounslow, Islington, Kensington, Lewisham and Wandsworth - less 50 per cent of children have been vaccinated.

Last summer scientists warned that Britain's threat of an epidemic was higher than ever, with as many as 100,000 people infected. In response the Government for the first time in years set up a "catch-up" campaign to target parents to ensure they were getting their children vaccinated. In addition, over one million doses of the vaccine were ordered in and primary care trusts told to start calling in children for an injection that had not been vaccinated.

A spokesperson for the Health Protection Agency confirmed it was too soon to tell whether vaccination rates had gone up.

Dr Mary Ramsay, an expert on immunisation at the HPA said, "The year-on-year increase of measles across England and Wales is very worrying. Last year saw the highest number of cases since the current method of monitoring the disease was introduced in 1995. "The majority of these cases could have been prevented, as most were in children who were not fully protected with MMR. There are still many children out there who were not vaccinated as toddlers in the past decade."