Vaccine uptake in children and young people

By Lynne Pearce

In March, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published new quality standards on vaccine uptake in the under-19s. Here are its recommendations.

Essential facts
The UK’s national immunisation programme has meant dangerous diseases, such as polio, have disappeared. But in some areas one in ten children are not being vaccinated against diseases including polio and diphtheria, while only one quarter of local authorities met the World Health Organization’s target of 95% of children being vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella (MMR).

What’s new
NICE has published new quality standards on vaccine uptake in the under-19s. Recommendations include follow-up telephone calls or text messages to families not attending immunisation appointments; those who missed a vaccination should be offered it again and checking a child’s immunisation at specific educational stages; and young offenders should be checked on entry into a secure setting and offered any outstanding vaccinations.

Risk factors
Delays in vaccination at the recommended time can mean a lack of protection against illnesses that are often more common and worse in younger children.
NICE estimates as many as three million children may have missed their MMR vaccine. Before immunisation was widely available, each year in the UK half a million children caught measles and 100 died from it.
Mumps can cause permanent deafness, viral meningitis and encephalitis, while rubella can have devastating effects on unborn children, including on their sight, hearing, heart and brain.

How you can help your patient
Nurses are pivotal in the UK’s immunisation programme, helping to deliver it and ensuring parents understand the importance of having their child vaccinated at the right time. They can also explain the benefits of catching up with any missed routine vaccinations.

Lynne Pearce is a freelance health journalist

Find out more
NICE Vaccine uptake in under 19s (March 2017)
nice.org.uk/guidance/qs145
British Infection Association
britishinfection.org
Meningitis Now
meningitisnow.org
Royal College of Paediatrics and Child health
rcpch.ac.uk
RCN immunisation information
tinyurl.com/RCN-vaccination
RCNi articles
Help for parents – online health tools (Nursing Children & Young People, October 2016)
rcni.com/vaccination-tools
Talking with parents about immunisation (Nursing Children and Young People, May 2013)
rcni.com/vaccination-parents
Primary Health Care
primaryhealthcare.com

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Leony Davies,
specialist nurse in immunisation, vaccine preventable disease programme, Public Health Wales

‘Nurses play such an important role in the vaccination of children and young people, so it is important that our views have been taken into account in the development of these standards.
‘One of the key themes is ensuring systems are in place to allow identification and follow-up of children and young people who are not up-to-date with their vaccinations, and so remain at risk from vaccine preventable diseases.
‘The inequalities gap in vaccine uptake widens as a child gets older. The sooner we can bring children up-to-date the better, and nurses working with children and young people in a variety of settings should take every opportunity to do this.’