

Science Media Centre Timeline

The MMR controversy

1988 – MMR introduced in UK, for the first time boys are immunised against rubella, there is a chance of getting wider measles vaccine coverage and mumps vaccination is included for the first time.

1993 onwards – Andrew Wakefield proposes measles jab causes Crohn’s disease, this is later disproved.

1995 – Uptake rate of vaccine is 95% enough for herd immunity for mumps, measles and rubella.

1998 – Andrew Wakefield suggests MMR and autism link at press briefing to launch research published in the *Lancet*

1998 – 14 year study suggests no problems with MMR vaccine published in *Lancet*.

1999 – Research published in the *Lancet* from the Royal Free, where Wakefield did his research, finds no evidence for MMR and autism link.

2000 – Andrew Wakefield and John O’Leary present evidence to US congress suggesting link between MMR and autism.

2000 – Another large scale study suggests benefits of MMR vastly outweigh risks.

2001 – *BMJ* study using GP Research Database suggests no link between MMR and autism.

2001 – Andrew Wakefield resigns from the Royal Free and University College Medical School

2002 – John O’Leary and colleagues suggest measles are present in guts of patients with autism in a paper in the *Journal of Clinical Pathology: Molecular pathology*. Scientists question methods and later a US legal case says methods unreliable.

2002-2004 – A large number of scientific studies find no link between MMR and autism including research published in British Medical Journal, New England Journal of Medicine, Pediatrics and Lancet

2004 – 10 co-authors on the 1998 Wakefield *Lancet* paper issue a retraction and editor of the Lancet says, with hindsight, they shouldn’t have published the paper.

2004-2005 – Uptake of MMR vaccine falls to 81%.

2005 – Large scale Japanese study shows MMR not linked to autism; Japan withdrew MMR and cases of autism continue to increase.

2005-2006 Uptake of MMR vaccine at 84%.

April 2006 - 13 year old boy becomes the first person in the UK to die from measles in 14 years.

June 2006 - It is announced that Andrew Wakefield is to face the General Medical Council over charges of professional misconduct.

2007 - Uptake of MMR vaccine increased to 85%. Department of Health would like the vaccine uptake to rise to 95% – a level that would give herd immunity.

July 2007 - GMC starts hearings against Wakefield and two of his colleagues.

January 2010 - GMC issues preliminary verdicts and finds Wakefield to have been 'irresponsible' in conducting unnecessary and invasive tests on children. The Lancet retracts Wakefield's original paper a couple of days later.

May 2010 - Wakefield is found guilty of serious professional misconduct and is struck off the medical register.

Sources / further information

NHS Information on Immunisation – up to beginning 2005

<http://www.mmrthefacts.nhs.uk/library/timeline.php?v=15>

Key research papers

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/5388260.stm>

BBC timeline – up to February 2008

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/1808956.stm>

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