Immunisation news

MMR vaccination policy

Following last month’s MMR articles in Vaccine Update it was clear that there was still some confusion about what the Departmental MMR vaccination policy is and whether the article was suggesting a change to that policy.

The article dealt with a specific question – that is, whether a GP is allowed to charge a patient when providing the MMR vaccine for travel or occupational health purposes. This is not a change to existing policy. The existing policy that any individual who has an unknown or incomplete vaccination history should be offered two doses of MMR still stands.

However, while the policy is that every individual should be vaccinated with two doses of MMR vaccine, the payment system for GPs under their contract does not oblige them to implement this in full. Therefore, where PCTs are attempting to run a catch-up to give individuals two doses of MMR vaccine, they must note that GPs are not obliged to provide it free to every patient.

The following table sets out in a flow diagram who is entitled to free centrally supplied MMR vaccine, and when the GP contract pays a GP for giving the vaccine. The table shows that GPs are obliged to provide the vaccine when they are paid to do so through the DES or Global Sum; they have discretion to choose to give it when they believe it is clinically necessary; they cannot charge their own patients for MMR vaccine as an occupational health vaccine; and they are at liberty to charge for it when it is given as a travel vaccine.

It is important for PCT coordinators to note that if they are implementing a catch-up programme with two doses of MMR, the second dose is not covered by the Global Sum. While it is hoped that most GPs would see that it is clinically necessary to provide both doses to ensure coverage, coordinators may need to discuss this with providers.

Please note that these particular circumstances are specific to MMR vaccine.

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Patient, or parent on behalf of their child, requesting an MMR vaccine

Patient under 6 years of age?

Yes → Vaccinate in line with routine schedule. GPs get a target payment for first dose of MMR. Second dose of MMR is covered by Global Sum. Use central stock.

No →

Patient under 16 years of age?

Yes → Policy is to ensure that individual has received two doses of MMR. GPs only remunerated for one dose through Global Sum. Use central stock.

No →

Patient aged 16 or over?

Yes → The policy is that all individuals with incomplete immunisation should receive two doses of MMR. However, how this is funded depends on the circumstances.

No →

Patient: A woman of child-bearing age, 16 years or older? (N.B. the GP contract does not specify what age parameters are considered child-bearing age)

No →

Note: This includes post partum women

Yes → Policy is to ensure individual has received two doses of MMR. GPs are only remunerated under Global Sum for giving one dose of MMR to seronegative women. Use central stock.

Patient: A man working in an antenatal setting?

Yes → Policy is to ensure individual has received two doses of MMR. GPs are only remunerated under Global Sum for giving one dose of MMR to seronegative men working in antenatal setting. Use central stock.

No →

Patient: Presenting for occupational health purposes?

Yes → It is the responsibility of the patient’s employer to arrange and pay for vaccination. GPs cannot charge their own patient but can charge a person who is not their registered patient (e.g. a person registered with a different general practice) for treatment, and consequently for occupational health immunisations.

No →

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Should a general practice provide occupational health services for local employers, this contractual arrangement would be a private matter between the GP and the employer. In these circumstances, some employees could be registered patients of the GP surgery and fees can be charged to the employer by the GP, as provider of occupational health services. As those receiving the vaccination are being treated as an employee, the policy of no direct charge on the patient still stands and the employer is responsible. However, should the employer pass charges onto the employee/patient then the GP could be in breach of the rules on charging patients.

Cannot use central stock – must buy privately.

**Note:** The only exception to this is men who work in an antenatal setting who are seronegative (see above).

Only four travel vaccines are routinely given for free on the NHS by GPs. These are polio, typhoid, the first dose of hepatitis A and cholera and the money that pays for these vaccines is a part of a GP’s Global Sum, i.e. not separated out specifically for these actions – GPs cannot charge a patient for giving these vaccines but a GP can claim a PA fee from the PCT.

If the MMR vaccination is for travel purposes, GPs may charge their patients, in which case they cannot reclaim any costs associated with this activity from their PCT. However, GPs also have the discretion not to charge, in which case they can claim the costs associated with the procurement of the vaccine (under 17.3 and 17.4 of the SFE) but not any fee for giving the injection.

MMR vaccine can be charged for if given as a travel vaccine. However, GPs can choose not to charge and claim the cost of vaccine from the PCT. Central stock cannot be used for travel vaccines.

Policy is to give two doses of MMR vaccine to anyone with incomplete immunisation history.

GPs can give any patient MMR vaccine from the central stock for free under section 15 of the Essential Services section of the GP contract if they feel it is clinically necessary and they do not qualify through being in one of the above groups.

Use central stock.
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