



Measles cases in England: January to March 2013

Summary

A total of 587 cases of measles with onset dates in the first quarter of 2013 (January – March) was confirmed in England (figure 1). This continues the trend of monthly totals which are around the highest recorded since the enhanced surveillance commenced in 1994 and follows the highest annual figure over the same period of 1920 laboratory confirmed cases in 2012.

The age distribution of the cases in the first quarter of 2013 shows a peak in the 10-14 year old age group with an apparent shift in age, when compared to the previous 4 years (figure 2). Analysis of cases by year of birth shows that, apart from children born in 2012 (who would be too young to be eligible for vaccination); attack rates are higher in the cohorts born between 1997-2006 (now aged 7-16 years) with the highest attack rates in individuals born in 2000 (now aged 12/13 years).

The 587 cases are distributed across England, although the north-West and north-East have the highest totals (table 1). The geographical pattern does not suggest widespread circulation across the country. Cases are still being reported from “hard-to-reach” populations with known low coverage (travelling community – 81 cases, Orthodox Jewish population – 41 cases); and 119 (20%) cases were associated with school outbreaks. In school outbreaks, the overall attack rate has been just below 1% with limited ongoing spread.

Overall around 18% of all cases in England were admitted to hospital; of the 108 cases admitted to hospital 15 of these experienced complications such as pneumonia, meningitis and gastroenteritis.

Although the incidence of measles appears to be sustained at a high level; a substantial proportion of cases are still associated with known low coverage groups. The predominance of cases being confirmed in secondary school aged children from the general community is of particular concern. These cohorts have been most affected by the decline in MMR coverage in the early part of the century (figure 3) and are therefore a key priority group for targeted interventions.

To reduce the transmission and spread of measles, Public Health England in collaboration with the Department of Health and NHS England have announced a MMR catch-up programme which has three key components:

- An urgent, targeted communication strategy pushing unvaccinated young people towards primary care or other appropriate providers



- A rapid active programme to identify and vaccinate unvaccinated and partially vaccinated 10-16 year olds
- A sustained intervention over the longer term that will strengthen current routine approaches and specifically target vulnerable and underserved populations.

Table 1: Age group and region distribution of laboratory confirmed cases of measles in England, January, February and March 2013

Region	Age group									Total
	<1y	1-4y	5-9y	10-14y	15-19y	20-24y	25-29y	30-34y	>=35y	
E Midlands	0	3	3	6	1	0	0	0	0	13
Eastern	0	7	7	7	3	0	1	0	4	29
London	3	16	13	21	7	4	0	1	2	67
N East	23	36	13	56	19	14	7	2	5	175
N West	32	29	25	33	31	8	9	5	7	179
S East	0	2	4	3	1	0	1	1	1	13
S West	4	6	9	16	1	2	3	4	3	48
W Midlands	0	2	7	4	1	0	0	0	1	15
Yorkshire & Humberside	6	9	6	9	2	8	2	1	5	48
Grand Total	68	110	87	155	66	36	23	14	28	587

Figure 1: Number of confirmed measles cases by month of onset, England: January 2008 to March 2013

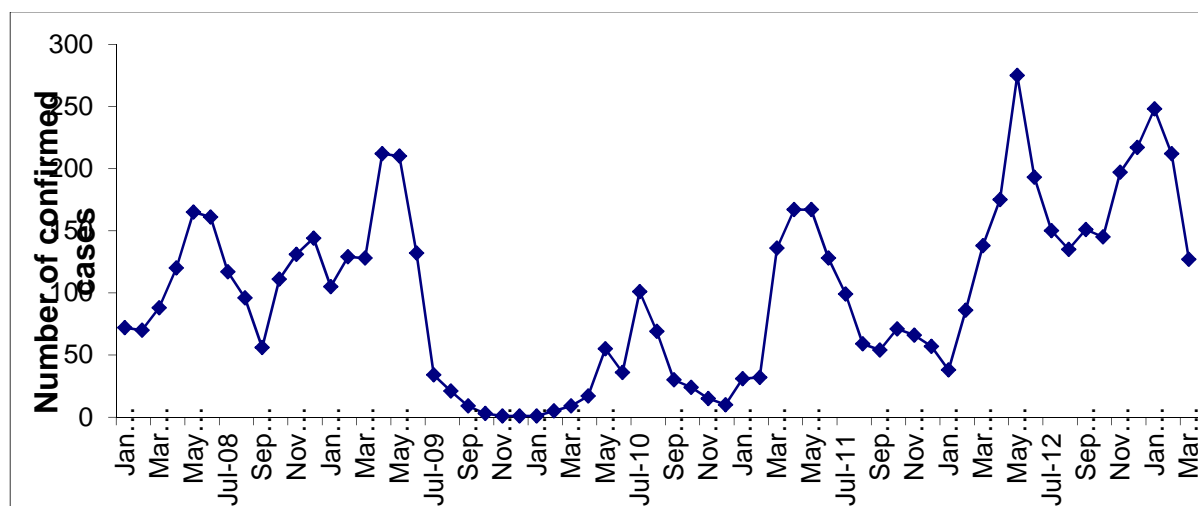




Figure 2: Age distribution of confirmed measles in England, January to March 2013, compared to 2009-2012 inclusive

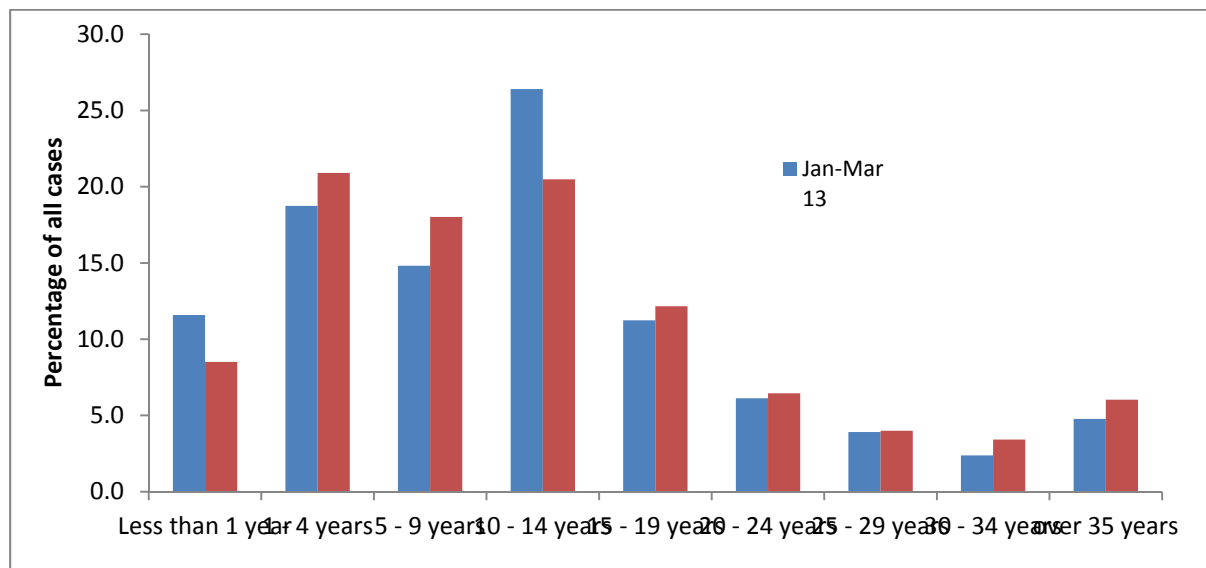


Figure 3: Annual first dose MMR coverage at 24 months and 5 years, England: April 1997 – March 2012

