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## Measles Threat Grows in Liverpool as Childhood Vaccinations Drop

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Liverpool is facing a growing public health concern as uptake of the Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine among children continues to decline, raising fears of a significant measles outbreak. With trust in public institutions eroding and misinformation spreading online, the city's low vaccination rates now pose a serious risk to vulnerable children.

Health officials are sounding the alarm after Alder Hey Children's Hospital treated 17 young patients for measles since June. Tragically, one child has died. Health officials are sounding the alarm after Alder Hey Children's Hospital treated 17 young patients for measles since June, during which one child with underlying health issues died. Once considered all but eliminated in the United Kingdom, measles is making a dangerous comeback. Matt Ashton, Director of Public Health for Liverpool City Council, warned that the city is approaching a tipping point. Only 73.4% of five-year-olds have received both required MMR doses, far short of the 95% coverage recommended to maintain herd immunity. In some areas of the city, the rate is even lower, hovering around 60%. Only around 73% of five-year-olds in Liverpool have received both MMR doses, well below the 95% coverage needed for herd immunity; some inner-city areas report rates nearer 60%.

The highly contagious nature of measles only intensifies the threat. Ashton emphasised that a single infected person can spread the disease to up to 15 unvaccinated individuals. Ashton emphasised that measles can infect between 12 and 18 unvaccinated individuals from a single case. With early symptoms mimicking common childhood illnesses, runny nose, sneezing, and coughing, the virus often goes undetected in its initial stages, enabling wider transmission before the hallmark rash appears.

Liverpool authorities are now deploying early intervention strategies to contain the spread, such as closely monitoring schools for clusters of infections and informing parents immediately when cases are identified. Ashton noted that the city is preparing to take more direct action, including door-to-door outreach in affected communities, if a broader outbreak takes hold.

Much of the resistance to vaccination is rooted in a broader societal shift. Several local parents cited a loss of trust in government and institutions following the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Katherine Higgins, a mother from Toxteth, explained that some parents remain fearful of vaccines, influenced by unfounded claims linking the MMR vaccine to autism despite decades of scientific research debunking that myth. "People are frightened. Since 2020, people have become cynical. They've lost faith," she told The i Paper.

This distrust is not isolated. Parents from Bootle and Anfield echoed similar concerns, pointing to widespread misinformation on social media. Jade Robinson from Walton said that even though her children are fully vaccinated, she fears for those who aren't. "The

distrust has gotten worse since COVID,” she said, adding that vaccine hesitancy has become a polarising issue that many now avoid discussing openly.

Liverpool City Council has been investigating the root causes behind the MMR vaccine’s falling uptake. A recent report suggested that “anti-establishment” sentiment and the rise of so-called “anti-vax” narratives are significant contributing factors. Chantelle Lunt, Chair of the Merseyside Alliance for Racial Equality, warned against making assumptions about particular communities, noting the lack of robust research to support such claims. Chantelle Lunt, chair of the Merseyside Alliance for Racial Equality, warned against assumptions about specific communities, noting there is insufficient research to support such claims. She added, “What people saw from leadership during the pandemic, mixed messages, hypocrisy, has severely damaged trust.”

As the summer holidays begin and children gather more frequently, the urgency of addressing vaccine hesitancy grows. As summer approaches and social mixing increases, the urgency of addressing vaccine hesitancy grows. Local officials and parents alike hope that the tragic loss of a child to a preventable illness will prompt others to act. Ashton put it plainly: “Prevention is better than cure, more effective, less costly, and it saves lives.”