

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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'Suspicion of vested interests' responsible for mixed MMR uptake, says expert

With the current measles outbreak in Wales showing no sign of slowing, questions are being asked over why so many parents refused to vaccinate their children with the MMR jab.

For one leading researcher on the issue, the actions and perceived motives of health professionals played a major role in parents' decisions. John Eversley, a Senior Lecturer at London Metropolitan University, carried out research in London's Tower Hamlets to understand the motives of parents in choosing or refusing immunisation for their children.

"There were variations in immunisation coverage by general practice which were not fully explained by differences in the practice population," said John. "In other words, what the GPs and their staff were or weren't doing was having a significant impact on take up. The NHS then put a lot of effort into improving the system of call and recall of children for immunisation and take up then improved significantly for young children. The problem now is to catch the generation of children who missed out."

'Vested interest'

John's research also identified suspicion of 'vested interest' as playing a role in parents' decisions, along with a failure to offer sufficient answers to parents' questions.

"Very few parents were 'conscientious objectors' to immunisation but they had questions which were either not answered, or the people who gave the answers were seen as having a vested interest – for example, they got paid for immunisation," said John. "To address the problems of catching up and the perception of vested interests it is probably necessary to not just identify trusted health professionals but also to train fellow parents to answer questions."

Somali community

The research also identified a specific issue in the Somali community relating to autism, a condition that became connected with the vaccine following comments by the controversial Dr Andrew Wakefield.

“Generally Somali families had not come across autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) in Somalia. So when they started experiencing it here, they did not know why it was happening,” said John.

“When the assertions by Andrew Wakefield and colleagues emerged, some families thought that might explain it. The independent expert was able to say categorically that the assertion had no basis in science. Other experts were able to point to a more likely explanation: that Vitamin D insufficiency and deficiency (the difference is severity) might be a cause of ASD.

“The NHS is now more aware of this potential connection as one of many reasons why people, particularly mothers-to-be should increase intake of Vitamin D.”

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Notes to editors:

John Eversley is available to provide media comment on the measles outbreak and the MMR vaccine from a community perspective. Please contact the London Metropolitan University Press Office (details below).

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