



# ADVERTORIAL *Your Voice*

# ADVERTORIAL *Your Health*

## Let's talk about MMR MOTHER TO MOTHER



Angela Graham, a mother who's apprehensive over the benefits and side effects of MMR, took part in last Saturday's Brixton vox pop. The vox pop tackled the issue of the rise of MMR in Brent's African Caribbean community.

We gave this anti-MMR mother, a black civil rights campaigner, the opportunity to put her concerns directly to another mother. Only this mother, Dr. Helen Bedford, happens to be a top child scientist, for Great Ormond Street Hospital and charity for children. Helen Bedford, senior lecturer in children's health at the Institute of Child Health, answers Angela's questions on MMR.

By Jacqueline Asafu-Adjaye | Photography by Ishmal Thomas



### YOUR VOICE YOUR HEALTH MMR

EXCLUSIVE

**AG:** I'm a grandmother and I've seen my children through measles. I purposely allowed them to catch it and they have grown fine. Why shouldn't it be safe for my grandchildren to catch measles as well?

**HB:** It's true that for most children measles will be unpleasant but not life threatening. At best, it is a miserable infection. However, about one in 15 children with measles have one or more complications. These include things like ear infections, fits (about one in 200), pneumonia and inflammation of the brain (encephalitis).

Before we immunised children against measles, between, 50 to 100 children died each year. Measles is more dangerous for children who have an existing health problem. In Africa a third of a million children die each year from measles.

The other issue is that immunisation doesn't just protect the children who have the vaccines. If enough people are immunised, it also protects others whom for whatever reason can't be immunised. This might

include pregnant women, children who can't have the vaccine because their immune systems are depressed through treatment or disease, and children under the age of one.

In fact the two children who died from measles in the last two years were teenage boys. Neither of them could have the vaccine because they had depressed immune systems. Imagine having a child who had recovered from a life threatening disease like leukemia who then picks up measles and dies.

**AG:** I'm fed up with doctors, as I never get a straight answer as to what the side effects are on anything. What are the side effects of MMR? Are they life threatening?

**HB:** It is common to have side effects following MMR vaccine but they are usually 'mild'. First as with any injection, there may be soreness and swelling at the place where the needle went in. About a week after the vaccine, children may develop 'mini-measles'. Basically, they look as though they have a mild attack of measles, so they may have a rash, a temperature, watery eyes and be generally off colour.

Sometimes children may have a fit caused by the fever (about one in 1000). So it is 5 times less likely, after the

vaccine than with the disease. While a health professional would describe these side effects as 'mild', they can be very worrying for a parent, but they are likely to be less worried if they know they might happen. Importantly, although it looks like a child has measles, they can't pass it on.

About three weeks after



Angela Graham's grandson, Zion, has had MMR jab

getting the MMR vaccine, some children get 'mini' mumps - like swelling under the ears. More rarely, children can get a rash of small bruise like spots in the six weeks after the vaccine. This can also happen with natural measles and mumps, but more frequently,

**AG:** Isn't it dangerous to pump children with three shots of mumps, measles and rubella all in one go? How can they cope with that onslaught of virus or bacteria in their young bodies?

**HB:** Our immune systems are designed to constantly deal with the millions of bacteria, viruses, and other things that they encounter.

**AG:** Is there no natural alternative to MMR? I'm a naturalist and I'm not a fan of artificial medicinal practice.

**HB:** No, there is no 'natural' alternative. The MMR vaccine is the most effective method of protecting children against measles, mumps and rubella. Really, it could be argued that MMR is 'natural' as it consists of the viruses that cause the diseases, but weakened so they don't cause the full blown disease.

**AG:** Would you vaccinate your children with MMR, not knowing what the risks were? What are the benefits of MMR?

**HB:** We do know the side effects of the MMR vaccine and they are much less than the risks from the diseases. We have a lot of experience with this vaccine, it has been in use since 1972 (in USA) and for 20 years in UK. The benefits of the vaccine are that they give a child protection against the diseases, which are potentially serious, in a controlled way.

the child might get serious infections. This has been looked at in a number of studies and it has been shown that children who are immunised do not get more in the way of serious infections. Nor do they have more asthma and other similar allergy related disorders.

**AG:** As a parent you can't help but feel frightened, as you can feel out of your depth with Doctors. And then there is the media around children becoming autistic as a result of MMR. Where can parents go to get independent advice on whether to vaccinate against MMR or not?

**HB:** The important thing is that any information you get, you can go and check it out. So that, rather than just accept it, you can make sure it is true by checking the evidence yourself.

Lots of research is now available on the Internet, but you need to be careful that it is clear what the source of the evidence is.

If you feel out of depth with your doctor, go and talk to your health visitor and they should be able to answer your questions. If not, your health visitor should know someone who can.

It is true that a few years ago there was a lot in the media about children who seemed to develop autism after being given the MMR vaccine.

However, the coverage by the media has reduced. The reason is that there is now a great deal of good evidence showing no link between the vaccine and autism.

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original paper, published in 1998, which sparked peoples' anxiety have made it clear they never intended people to stop using the MMR vaccine, and accept that, the evidence is against a link.

**AG:** As a mother what ran

through your mind when the letter arrived, urging you to give your child MMR?

My two sons are now teenagers. Like any mother, when the time came to have them immunised, I felt anxious. This was mainly because

I didn't want them to be upset when the needles went in. However, I didn't hesitate, I'm glad I did it and I would do it again tomorrow. They are both extremely healthy (touch wood) and barely even have colds. But I can understand why

the decision is more difficult for some parents. Most of us have no experience of the diseases, so they do not seem to be a real threat, instead we read and hear scary stories about children who seem to have had severe reactions to the vaccine.

All parents want to do is protect their children from harm and sometimes it can appear that the vaccines are more harmful than the diseases. As a scientist the evidence tells me clearly that vaccination is the best thing to do to

protect my children from harm. MMR is highly effective and has a good safety record and has saved the lives of literally millions of children and prevented even more children from having serious disabilities.

## VOX POP BRIXTON MUMS TELL BRENT MUMS TO WEIGH UP THE PROS & CONS OF MMR JAB



MMR verdict

Michael and Sharon Morrison with grandson Aaron, say very likely to MMR jab

### MICHAEL AND SHARON MORRISON, GRANDPARENTS OF AARON

**V:** How old is Aaron?  
**SM:** Two and a half years old.

**V:** Has your grandchild had the MMR triple jab?  
**MM:** No. We received the vaccination letter a couple of weeks ago.

**V:** What would you say to African Caribbean parents in Brent?  
**SM:** We've been very worried about the side effects of

MMR. But reading about what could happen if we don't give Aaron the triple jab is even more worrying. Aaron's mum was vaccinated when he was his age. His granddad is not so sure. I'd recommend the MMR triple jab.

**V:** What are the chances of Aaron getting vaccinated, following The You Health Your Voice six week measles campaign?  
**MM:** Eight out of ten. Yes, Aaron will get the jab.



MMR verdict

Angela Graham (right) with her daughter and grandson Zion. Undecided about MMR jab

### ANGELA GRAHAM, GRANDMOTHER OF ZION

**V:** How old is Zion?  
**AG:** Two years old.

**V:** Has your grandson had the MMR triple jab?  
**AG:** Yes.

**V:** What would you say to African Caribbean parents in Brent who are scared to give their child the jab?  
**AG:** I understand their fear. I wasn't keen on Zion getting vaccinated. Black parents in

Brent need to question their doctors thoroughly and keep on asking, until they get answers they understand in lay man terms. As a parent you have the right to have a clear understanding of the side effects of any vaccination. So you can weigh those side effects against the jab's benefits. I'd say, "Think. What are the benefits of MMR to your child?"

### MONICA GOMES, MOTHER OF MAYARA

**V:** How old is Mayara?  
**MG:** Three years old.

**V:** Has your daughter had the MMR triple jab?  
**MG:** Yes. Mayara has had the full vaccination, including the MMR top up.

I'm a nurse and I like to protect Mayara, and I don't like to expose her to any disease, if I can prevent it. I've even give her the BCG jab which is again voluntary, to protect her against Tuberculosis.

**V:** What would you say to African Caribbean parents in Brent who are scared to give their child the jab?  
**MG:** Don't be afraid. Mayara is fine, she hardly catches a cold. My daughter is very happy and healthy. When she was given MMR she experienced no side effects. I'm really surprised that measles is spreading in Brent. I'd say don't put your child through measles or any disease- it's too risky. Don't delay the triple jab.

Measles is spreading in Brent

Don't let your child catch it Here are the facts

NHS Brent

www.immunisation.nhs.uk

NEXT WEEK

*Your Voice*  
*Your Health*

Shows you how the MMR vaccine works in your child's body