

# Public Health: Cheshire town at centre of UK measles outbreak

Crewe in Cheshire used to be the railway's equivalent of London's Heathrow airport - the major hub to which north-south, and east-west travellers would mix and mingle. If anywhere was to be the place where a SARS-like epidemic would spread from, Crewe would have been a candidate. It's importance as a hub has gone - but a serious attack of measles is raising concern that it might spread and kill.

Measles might be regarded as a simple and rather amusingly named children's disease.

But it's not at all funny and it can kill. The numbers of cases has been rising steadily since concerns arose several years ago that the combined MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella) vaccine might, in some cases, have severe side effects. Some parents decided not to have their children vaccinated.

Last year, the number of confirmed cases was 990 - a figure that has been easily passed this year with well over 1,000 cases confirmed. To try to contain the Cheshire outbreak, which is not officially described as an epidemic, more than 10,000 children will, over the next few days, be vaccinated in some 200 schools. Some at-risk staff will also be vaccinated, if they wish.

Although deaths are rare, in 2006 the first victim for 14 years died in the same part of the country.