

Were all of these children killed by the triple MMR jab?

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Focus By Lucy Johnston
Health Editor

AT LEAST 26 families claim their children died as a result of the controversial measles, mumps and rubella jab, the Sunday Express can reveal.

In some cases the Government has awarded parents up to £100,000 under its 1979 Vaccine Damage Payment Act. In others, post mortem reports concluded the jab was the most likely cause of death. Despite this, the Department of Health insists no child has ever died from MMR.

This assertion is a key aspect of its £3 million publicity drive to persuade parents the vaccine is entirely safe.

It contradicts the view of the US Government, which accepts children die from MMR and awards compensation as a result. Most children do not react to the jab, but medical literature supports the view that MMR can occasionally kill.

The parents are now demanding an official inquiry into the deaths. Julie Roberts, 40, whose daughter Stacey died, said: "The Government should take responsibility. It has never given proper warnings of the risk and still doesn't despite the evidence. Tony Blair can see his children at home. I have to visit my daughter at her grave."

Experts writing in the Journal of Pediatrics concluded that of 48 children who reacted to the measles component of the jab, eight died and the rest had seizures or brain damage. And a recent study on 1.8 million children by the Finnish Health Board linked neurological reactions, allergic attacks, epilepsy and meningitis to the vaccine. Our research follows speculation over whether Tony Blair's 19-month-old son Leo has had the MMR jab. The Prime Minister has said he fully supports the vaccine but will not say if Leo has had it.

Many of the families of children who have died have taken legal action. Richard Barr, of solicitors Alexander Harris, has details of 24 cases. He said: "It is widely acknowledged in medical literature and by the American government that the triple vaccine can, on rare occasions, kill, yet this Government won't accept it."

Jackie Fletcher, of the pressure group Jabs, which is trying to highlight the potential dangers, said: "The Government should be giving people full and accurate information about health risks."

But a Department of Health spokesman insisted: "Parents who received payments after their children died following MMR would not get the money now as science has moved on. MMR protects against death and we stand by the fact that no child has died as a result of MMR."

Wendy Francis's son, Robert, began behaving abnormally two years after he had MMR in January 1990. He lost control of his movements and slept for 18 hours at a time. Within months he fell into a coma and died in December. Robert, then seven, had developed a degenerative brain condition called SSPE (sub-acute sclerosis pan encephalitis), linked to the measles component.

The disease can have a long incubation period and Mrs Francis, 40, an auxiliary nurse and Robert's consultant think the vaccine was the only way Robert could have developed it. The family, from Easington, north Yorkshire, are taking legal action against the vaccine's manufacturer.

Ashley Shipman was born in 1985 and was a healthy three-year-old when he received the MMR vaccine. When he was nine his parents Elaine and Andrew of Eastwood, Nottingham, noticed he was having problems with his balance and co-ordination. He too was diagnosed with SSPE and died in June 1999, aged 14. They received £30,000 compensation.

His father, a lorry driver, said: "We took Ashley into hospital in October 1994 and by Christmas he was in a wheelchair. We were told by the consultant who treated him that his condition was caused by his vaccination."

In 1995 the Government's vaccine damage tribunal paid £30,000 compensation to James Smith, of Gateshead, for brain damage after he was given MMR at the age of four. James died nine years later aged 13. Biopsy material taken from his brain and intestines will form a central plank of the scientific evidence in support of a legal case due to be heard in October next year. Up to 300 cases relate to this brand of vaccine - Pluserix - which was banned by the Department of Health in 1992 after being linked with meningitis. This was two years after an identical vaccine was banned in Canada.

John and Faye Smith say the jab transformed their healthy, intelligent son into a child needing round-the-clock care. It took them six years and four hearings, however, to persuade the vaccine damage tribunal of this.

Faye, 59, said: "It's not about money, but truth. It's diabolical that the Government refuses to acknowledge the risks of MMR."

Judith Dwyer, 45, of Tongwynlaif, near Cardiff, received a payment after her four-year-old daughter Chloe died following a "booster" jab in 1989. She too was given a version later banned because of its dangerous side effects. Chloe developed pins and needles in her legs, then paralysis and problems breathing. She was rushed to hospital but it was too late.

After an eight-year fight Judith, an intensive care technician, persuaded a tribunal the jab was the likely cause of Chloe's death. In September 1996 it accepted this and paid out.

Mother of two Judith said: "Health visitors called me a scare mongerer and laughed. But we fought to raise the profile of vaccine damage."

Stacey Berry, of Atherton, Manchester was 13 when she had a booster jab in November 1994. Days later she started having fits, "stopped smiling, and stared into space."

She was diagnosed with the brain disease SSPE and given two years to live. She died in November 2000, aged 19. A post mortem examination concluded the disease was a "rare complication" of the vaccine".

Christopher Coulter was 15 when he suffered a fit and died in his sleep 10 days after being vaccinated. He had an unblemished health record and no history of epilepsy but no explanation has been offered other than the statement on his death certificate - "asphyxiation due to severe epileptic seizure". His mother Anne of Hillsborough, northern Ireland said: "Nothing would replace Christopher, but I want answers. I want peace of mind for my daughters should they ever have children."

Hannah Buxton was 18 months old when she reacted to her first MMR jab. She started having fits and died 18 months later in February 1992.

Parents Carol and Tony of Towcester, Northants, did not know Hannah had been given the strain of vaccine later withdrawn after it was deemed unsafe. In March that year a tribunal blamed the vaccine for her death.

Nicola Gentle, 29, of Plymouth, Devon, is convinced her 15-month-old baby Emma Jane died because of the triple vaccine she was given in September 1998. Within six hours she was on a life-support machine. Three days later she was brain dead but a coroner said he could not say for certain whether or not MMR had killed her.

Shirley Fitzgerald's son Kieren was given the MMR jab in June 1991 when he was 14 months. He reacted within days. "He stopped smiling, laughing and crying and became frightened of his toys," said Shirley.

Kieren also developed bowel problems - linked to MMR by some scientists. In July 1992, he died, aged two.

Toddler Harriet Moore died following an MMR vaccination in 1998. Six weeks later she suffered fits and died in her parents arms. Sarah and Pat Moore, of Peasedown St John, near Bath, took the case to tribunal.

Jade Scrimger was vaccinated with MMR at 17 months and died from meningitis three days later in October 1998. Her mother Sheena has since discovered the drug used on her daughter was later banned by the Department of Health because it caused meningitis.

She has abandoned the idea of taking legal action against the vaccine manufacturers,

however, because lawyers say it is not worth it. In Britain the maximum award for a child's death is £7,500.

Five days after Elaine Adam's 16-month-old son Stevie was given the MMR vaccine 1991 he too developed meningitis and died.

Elaine and her husband Robert, of East Kilbride, were convinced MMR was to blame but their fears were dismissed by doctors. Mrs Adam has refused to allow her second child, Terry, six, to have the jab.

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OPINION

Vaccination vacillation

WE REPORT today on the families who have lost babies, they believe, due to the MMR vaccination. Their claims add further confusion to the debate about this injection, yet Tony Blair has still not offered reassurance on the matter by telling us that his son Leo has had this vaccination. It means thousands of parents are paying doctors to give their child these three inoculations separately. Mr Blair must explain where he stands on this. Only then will parents feel more confident.

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