

# Rotavirus Vaccination Programme

In July a new vaccine was introduced into the childhood immunisation schedule.

## *What is rotavirus?*

Rotavirus is a highly infectious virus which causes gastroenteritis; diarrhoea and dehydration. It is the commonest cause of gastroenteritis among young children. Infections are often recurrent. Most children will experience at least one or more rotavirus infection by five years of age.

## *Who is affected by rotavirus?*

Rotavirus can affect people of all ages but the highest incidence is in young children. It is estimated that rotavirus infections cause around half of all gastroenteritis in children less than five years of age. Young infants are more likely to suffer from dehydration if they become infected with rotavirus than older children or adults and need admitting to hospital.

## *The rotavirus vaccination programme*

Rotavirus vaccination is also part of the routine infant immunisation programme in a number of other countries and in the USA; studies have shown that rotavirus related hospital admissions for young children have been cut by more than two thirds since rotavirus vaccination was introduced.

## *How many doses will infants receive?*

The objective of the programme is to provide two doses of Rotavirus to infants before 24 weeks of age. Infants will be offered two doses with an interval of at least four weeks between doses: at 8 weeks (2 months) and again at 12 weeks (3 months).

## **When will infants receive the vaccine?**

All babies scheduled to receive their primary vaccines at age 8 weeks and 12 weeks will be offered the rotavirus vaccine when they attend for their usual vaccinations at that age.