

ASK Dr ELLIE



@Dr_Ellie

The Mail on Sunday's brilliant GP... with all the health answers YOU need

Just who is entitled to a shingles jab?

Q I RECENTLY read that there has been a drop in the number of 70-year-olds having the shingles jab, which is worrying 'health chiefs'.

I suspect the reason is that the way the NHS is rolling out the vaccination process is too complicated for patients to understand, hence they are not applying for the jab. Can you explain the process?

A I HAVE to agree – my own head swims when I try to explain this. The start of any vaccination programme is fraught with difficulties in terms of logistics and who to include. Currently we are seeing this issue with the new meningitis B vaccination programme, which is fantastic for those included, but seems unfair to those who have just missed out thanks to the date they were born.

Why should a baby born on May 1 be vaccinated, but not those born on April 30? The reality is that a programme has to start somewhere and when we are dealing with finite resources – not just money but actual vaccination supply – boundaries do have to be set. This is what accounts for the very confusing recommendations for the national shingles vaccination programme.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation recommended that all 70-year-olds be vaccinated: this is deemed to be the most at-risk age group, and the age at which we know the vaccine is most effective.

The protection is thought to last eight years so vaccinating a 70-year-old takes them through most of their 70s.

We know vaccinating those over 80 becomes much less effective, so those in this age group will not be offered the jab on the NHS.

Here is where it gets cryptic: the jab is currently being offered to all people who are aged 70 and 78 between October 1 2015 and before August 31 2016.

In addition, anyone who WAS eligible for immunisation in the first two years of the programme but has not yet been vaccinated against shingles remains eligible until their 80th

birthday. This includes people aged 71 and 72 on 1 September 2015 and people aged 79. Everyone eligible should automatically receive a letter. If you are in any doubt call your GP.

Q I AM a 72-year-old man in reasonably good health, other than a problem with the tips of my thumbs. They become very dry and the skin flakes off in large chunks, sometimes down to the raw flesh, which is very painful and disabling. My doctor simply recommends keeping them moisturised. The only thing that helps is to use hydrocortisone cream and wrap the end of my thumbs in micropore plaster. Any other suggestions?

A THIS is a typical description of dermatitis, an inflammatory condition of the skin that can be widespread or just focused on one area. The fingers and thumbs are a common site, possibly because the condition is linked to the abundant use of harsh soaps and highly irritant handwashes.

Treating any type of dermatitis takes a lot of effort, which constitutes more than simply moisturising them. Dermatological advice would be to avoid soap and handwash altogether and to use an emollient to wash with. Aqueous cream, from pharmacies, is perfect for this.

Moisturising well is the crucial next part of treatment; a simple moisturiser will not be enough for dermatitis, while cosmetic moisturisers can contain irritants such as perfume. A suitable cream or ointment can be prescribed or bought from the pharmacist; these are usually paraffin-based and need to be applied at least four times a day.

This can be tricky with fingers and thumbs as greasiness can affect daily activities.

For a bad dermatitis, the last step of treatment is to add in a steroid cream, which will treat and lessen the inflammation.

Hydrocortisone is a mild steroid cream that can suffice; often with dermatitis affecting hands, we use a stronger prescription, a once-daily steroid cream that can be applied at night. This gives it a chance to work overnight.

HAVE a think about your health on holiday before you vote in the EU referendum. The IN campaigners argue that reciprocal arrangements protecting British travellers abroad may no longer be valid if we leave the EU. Currently British tourists can use an EHIC card to use local healthcare systems when in Europe, aside from their private travel insurance schemes. If Britain leaves, the EHIC scheme is unlikely to continue. Health may also be an issue for the two million expats in Europe – they won't be entitled to local healthcare after a Brexit.



Mum Katie's not callous, just honest

LET'S not be too quick to judge Katie Price for her admission last week that, had she known the severity of her eldest son Harvey's health problems while she was pregnant, she would have had an abortion. Taken out of context it sounded breathtakingly callous. But her comment was just the opposite: the former glamour model was criticising her younger self – she was 24 and unsupported by his father footballer Dwight Yorke, when she had him – for knowing so little, and saying that it would have been a bad decision. Price, now 37, knows that.

She always shows that Harvey, 13 – who has Prader-Willi syndrome, autism, ADHD and is blind – is very much a cherished part of her family. The subject she raises is crucial to acknowledge. We must not shy away from these difficult conversations about the realities of life as a parent of a child with disabilities.



WISE WORDS: Katie Price. Inset above: Out with her son Harvey

The Boots 'choice' that won't wash

ONE of the arguments that crops up in the obesity debate is that some people choose to buy junk food. Well, yes they do, but it takes a lot of willpower to avoid the constant bombardment of unhealthy choices we face. Here's an example. I was in Boots this week and saw these sweets, right, placed beside the shampoos I was choosing from. I tweeted this picture and Boots responded saying they were 'giving customers products they tell us they want' but planned to stop putting sweets 'at till points'. Lame!



DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR DR ELLIE CANNON?

Email DrEllie@mailonsunday.co.uk or write to Health, The Mail on Sunday, 2 Derry Street, London W8 5TT. Dr Ellie can only answer in a general context and cannot respond to individual cases, or give personal replies. If you have a health concern, always consult your own GP.

Why should I take... FEVERFEW

THIS WORKS!

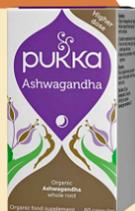
Traditionally used to reduce fever (hence the name) the herb feverfew is believed to help prevent migranes.

Available as a daily 100mg capsule, the leaves of the herb contain a chemical called parthenolide, which appears to block the build-up of platelet blood

cells in the arteries that can cause inflammation and migraine.

A study of 72 patients found a 24 per cent reduction in the number and severity of migranes in those who took feverfew.

Pukka Ashwagandha supplement Katie Pande, Pukka Herbs senior adviser, says: 'The root of the Ashwagandha helps improve sleep. Our anonymous survey of 218 people taking it for a month saw sleep quality soar by 66.9 per cent.' £11.95 for 60 capsules, pukkaherbs.com.



Ask a STUPID QUESTION

WILL PLAYING CLASSICAL MUSIC TO A BABY IN THE WOMB MAKE THEM MORE INTELLIGENT?

Dr Vanessa Mackay, spokesperson for the Royal College

of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, says: 'Music can reduce anxiety during pregnancy, but the effects on baby are less well understood. One study showed that, at four months,

babies responded differently to music heard in the last trimester than to music they had not heard before, but there is no evidence that a specific genre makes them more intelligent.'