HERD (COMMUNITY) IMMUNITY

What is herd immunity?

‘Herd immunity is a form of immunity that occurs when the vaccination of a significant portion of a population (or herd) provides a measure of protection for individuals who have not developed immunity.’

It arises when a high percentage of the population is protected through vaccination against a virus or bacteria, making it difficult for a disease to spread because there are so few susceptible people left to infect.

This can effectively stop the spread of disease in the community. It is particularly crucial for protecting people who cannot be vaccinated. These include children who are too young to be vaccinated, people with immune system problems, and those who are too ill to receive vaccines (such as some cancer patients).

The proportion of the population which must be immunised in order to achieve herd immunity varies for each disease but the underlying idea is simple: once enough people are protected, they help to protect vulnerable members of their communities by reducing the spread of the disease.

However, when immunisation rates fall, herd immunity can break down leading to an increase in the number of new cases. For example, measles outbreaks in the UK and pertussis outbreaks in the US have been attributed to declining herd immunity.

Using animation, this video helps to explain how herd immunity works and what happens when herd immunity breaks down. It is designed to be used as an educational tool, ideally supported by an experienced trainer.

Reference: