

Measles and rubella elimination

Measles and rubella are highly infectious diseases that can have serious and even fatal consequences. They can affect not only infants and children but also adults. Although effective, safe and cheap vaccines are available for these diseases, they continue to burden the Member States in the WHO European Region. Measles outbreaks have occurred in many countries in the last three years, with the largest in Bulgaria, France and Ukraine. During this period, large rubella outbreaks occurred in countries such as Poland and Romania. The regional target of eliminating measles and rubella by 2015 is under threat.

<p>Measles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measles is a highly contagious, serious disease caused by a virus. • Symptoms include high fever, cough and a rash. • Both adults and children can suffer serious complications, including brain inflammation (encephalitis) and pneumonia. • Measles can be fatal; globally it is a leading cause of death among children under 5 years of age. 	<p>Rubella</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubella is usually a mild viral disease in children, but infection in a pregnant woman can be devastating to the fetus. • Congenital rubella syndrome occurs in 90% of cases of rubella infection in early pregnancy. • Miscarriage or stillbirth can occur and babies born with congenital rubella syndrome can suffer from range of problems, including deafness, blindness and mental retardation.
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Burden of measles and rubella

In the last three years, some 100 000 cases of measles, resulting in 37 deaths and thousands of hospitalizations, have been reported in the European Region. Many recent outbreaks have occurred in high-income countries (such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom), where the cost of vaccinating each person would have been around €35. The cost of health care for a case of measles in a high-income country would be €30 on average.

Rubella is believed to be severely underreported and the burden of disease, including that from congenital rubella syndrome, is underestimated. This makes the economic impact of rubella impossible to measure. Almost 45 000 rubella cases were reported the Region in 2010–2012, owing to outbreaks in Poland and Romania. The outbreak in Poland continues. Since 2000, 201 cases of congenital rubella syndrome have been reported and, with recent and continuing outbreaks, more cases are very likely to emerge.

Elimination in Europe is an achievable goal – the case of the Americas

In 1990, 250 000 cases of measles led to 10 000 deaths in the WHO Region of the Americas. In 1994, the countries in the Region agreed to work together to eliminate endemic measles transmission. They achieved their goal in 2002 by:

- strengthening routine immunization;
- conducting supplementary immunization activities in areas identified as at high risk;
- improving surveillance and reporting;
- following robust procedures to verify elimination.

Accelerated action plan to eliminate measles and rubella in the WHO European Region

During the sixty-third session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, held in Çeşme Izmir, Turkey on 16–19 September 2013, the WHO Regional Office for Europe has launched a six-step accelerated plan of action to conquer measles and rubella once and for all. It outlines how WHO and other partners will support countries in:

- strengthening of vaccination and immunization systems;
- improvement of surveillance;
- outbreak prevention and response;
- communications, information and advocacy;
- resource mobilization and partnerships; and
- verification of measles and rubella elimination.

For further information, contact:

Further information on the work of the WHO Regional Office for Europe and Member States to eliminate measles and rubella is available on the Regional Office web site

(<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/communicable-diseases/measles-and-rubella>).