

Elimination of Measles

What is the issue?

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Measles is a major childhood killer, claiming an estimated 54 500 lives in 2015.

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Measles:

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Measles is a virus that can be transmitted through airdrops, personal contact and infected surfaces, and can inflict a range of deadly complications including pneumonia, diarrhoea, encephalitis and malnutrition.

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What are the measures taken by the government?

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- Governments have committed to **eliminating the problem by 2020**.

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- WHO is advocating for all of the countries to eliminate measles by 2020 — a target that is achievable.

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- Two doses of measles-containing vaccine have now been introduced in each of the region's 11 countries. 95 per cent coverage of both doses has been achieved in five.

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- Where routine childhood vaccination programmes are less than ideal, **supplementary immunisation drives** have helped close immunity gaps.

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- In 2015 alone around 18 million children were reached by supplementary campaigns, while an estimated 640 000 lives were saved.

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What need to be done?

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- Though supplementary campaigns are useful to close immunity gaps in the short run, routine systems should be strengthened and coverage enhanced.

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- At the same time, in countries where most children are now covered by vaccinations, and where the disease is seen in adults, efforts should be made to achieve immunity at all ages.

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- **Improving surveillance and laboratory capacity** is likewise essential.

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- Though each country has, to varying degrees, implemented functional surveillance systems, not all cases are reported or laboratory confirmed.

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- Therefore, health authorities should reinforce and expand surveillance to the community level.

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- **Encourage health-seeking behaviour** when measles-related symptoms such as fever and rash occur.

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- Leverage support from international stakeholders to mobilise resources and know-how.

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- Address socio-cultural issues while creating greater awareness. It means establishing and maintaining political commitment at the local and national level.

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- WHO is privileged to be a part of these efforts, and to support countries as they strive to eliminate measles' preventable burden.

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Controlling Rubella:

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- The wider benefits of measles vaccination strengthening will be substantial.

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- This is especially so for the control of rubella, a disease that affects

approximately 40 000 births in the region every year, and can cause a series of conditions such as deafness and heart disease when transmitted from mother to foetus.

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- Mass immunisation catch-up campaigns will have wide-ranging impact, and will enhance the life chances of millions of children.

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- By eliminating measles, millions of children will be given the opportunity to grow and prosper where they otherwise may not have.

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- Health systems will be strengthened, and other diseases better controlled.

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- For the South-East Asia region, and each of the countries within it, measles elimination is a cause worth mobilising for.

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Source: The Hindu

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