South Asia's Immunization Milestone

***Prelims**: Current Events of National and International Importance*

Why in News?

According to new data recently released by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF for 2024, South Asia achieves record immunization coverage with India, Nepal leads progress.

- **Historic Milestone -** South Asia recorded its ***highest-ever immunization coverage*** for children in 2024, as per new WHO-UNICEF data.
- This achievement is seen as a major milestone in the region's fight against vaccine-preventable diseases.
- **India Achievements -** India reduced ***zero-dose children*** (those who have not received a single vaccine) by 43%, from 1.6 million (2023) to 0.9 million (2024).
    - Still, India accounts for *6.4% of global zero-dose children* and nearly half of South Asia's zero-dose cases.
- **Nepal Progress -** Nepal achieved a 52% reduction in zero-dose children.
- **Pakistan Updates -** Pakistan recorded its *highest-ever DTP3 coverage* (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis) at 87% in 2024.
- **Afghanistan Setback -** Afghanistan experienced the *lowest immunization coverage* show 1% decline in the region.
- **DTP Vaccine**
    - In South Asia, **92% of infants received the third dose of DTP** in 2024 (up 2 percentage points from 2023).
    - **First-dose DTP coverage** increased from 93% to 95%, surpassing pre-COVID levels.
    - **Zero-Dose Reduction -** The region as a whole saw zero-dose children *drop by 27%* i.e. from 2.5 million (2023) to 1.8 million (2024).
- **Measles Control**
    - **First dose of measles vaccine** coverage reached 93%, and second dose 88% in 2024 (up from 90% and 87% in 2023).
    - **Measles cases fell 39%**, from over 90,000 (2023) to about 55,000 (2024).
    - Coverage still **below the 95% threshold** needed to prevent outbreaks.
- **HPV Vaccine**
    - **HPV coverage for adolescent girls** rose from 2% (2023) to 9% (2024) regionally.
    - Bangladesh vaccinated over 7.1 million girls since programmer launch in 2023.
    - **Notable increases -** Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka.

    - Nepal launched national HPV vaccination (Feb 2025), vaccinating over 1.4 million girls.
    - India rolled out plans for indigenous HPV vaccine developments in later year of 2024.
- **Support systems** -Progress driven by *government investment*, policy, frontline/community workers (many women), donor/partner support, digital tools, improved data and outreach programs.
- **Remaining Gaps** - Despite progress, *2.9 million children in South Asia remain under-vaccinated* and are unprotected.
- **Future recommendations -** UNICEF and WHO urges for
    - Sustained political commitment.
    - Increased domestic immunization funding.
    - Intensive outreach for zero-dose and under-vaccinated children.
    - Reinforced disease surveillance systems.

Quick Facts
• **UNICEF,** the United Nations Children's Fund, is a UN agency focused on providing humanitarian and development aid to children worldwide. It was established in 1946. • The **World Health Organization (WHO)** is a specialized agency of the United Nations which coordinates responses to international public health issues and emergencies.

Reference

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