

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 programme 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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