

## **Vaccine Hesitancy - Measles Spread**

### **What is the issue?**

- There was a 30% increase in measles cases worldwide in 2018.
- Given this, overcoming 'vaccine hesitancy' is crucial to reduce the global spread of measles infection.

### **What is measles?**

- Measles is a highly contagious viral disease.
- It is transmitted via droplets from the nose, mouth or throat of infected persons.
- Initial symptoms, which usually appear 10-12 days after infection, include high fever, a runny nose, bloodshot eyes, and tiny white spots on the inside of the mouth.
- Several days later, a rash develops, starting on the face and upper neck and gradually spreading downwards.
- It remains an important cause of death among young children globally, despite the availability of a safe and effective vaccine.

### **How significant is vaccine?**

- Under the Global Vaccine Action Plan, measles and rubella are targeted for elimination in five WHO Regions by 2020.
- Measles viruses kill immune cells, leaving the child vulnerable to infectious diseases for two to three years.
- So, measles vaccine not only provides lifelong protection against the virus but also reduces mortality from other childhood infections.

### **What is vaccine hesitancy?**

- Vaccine hesitancy is defined as the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines.
- The threat from vaccine hesitancy appears to have grown more dangerous to public health.
- With rise in measles cases in 2018, the WHO, in January 2019, included 'vaccine hesitancy' as one of the 10 threats to global health in 2019.

### **How is measles prevalence at present?**

- After a surge in measles cases in 2018, there have been around 3,65,000 measles cases reported from 182 countries in the first 6 months of 2019.
- The biggest increase, of 900% in the first 6 months of 2019 compared with the same period last year, has been from the WHO African region.
- (The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar and Nigeria accounted for most cases.)
- There has been a sharp increase in the WHO European region too, with 90,000 cases being recorded in the same period.
- This was more than the numbers recorded for the whole of 2018.
- The infection spread in the European region has been unprecedented in recent years.
- Recently, the U.K., Greece, the Czech Republic and Albania lost their measles elimination status.

### **How is vaccine confidence in Europe?**

- A 2018 report on vaccine confidence among the European Union member states gives insights into the reasons for less vaccine coverage.
- It shows why vaccine coverage has not been increasing in the European region to reach over 90% to offer protection even to those not vaccinated.
- There, younger people (18-34 years) and those with less education are less likely to agree that the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine is safe.
- Only 52% respondents from 28 EU member states agree that vaccines are definitely effective in preventing diseases; a 33% felt they were probably effective.
- More alarming is that 48% of the respondents believed that vaccines cause serious side effects.
- 38% of them think vaccines actually cause the disease that they are supposed to protect against.

### **What is the case with India?**

- 45% of children missed different vaccinations in 121 Indian districts that have higher rates of unimmunised children.
- A 2018 study found low awareness to be the main reason for this.
- While 24% did not get vaccinated due to apprehension about adverse effects, 11% were reluctant to get immunised for reasons other than this.

### **What lies ahead?**

- Much work remains to be done to address misinformation.
- Social media plays a crucial role in spreading vaccine misinformation.

- A commitment by Facebook to reduce distribution of vaccine misinformation can go a long way in addressing vaccine hesitancy.

**Source: The Hindu**

