The measles and rubella data from 2022 paint a multicolored picture: one where our successes in increasing vaccination coverage are meet with constant challenges. Due to significant disruptions in its health services driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, millions more children missed doses of life-saving vaccines.

According to the WHO/UNICEF Estimates of National Immunization Coverage (WUNEC), the recovery of measles vaccinations from COVID-19’s disruption has lagged other benchmark immunizations such as the 3rd dose of diphtheria, tetanus toxoid, and pertussis (DTP3), leaving nearly 33 million children missing one or both doses of the measles vaccine.

INEQUALITIES IN VACCINES ACCESS

Despite four million more children receiving routine vaccines in 2022 than in 2021, progress has not been equal among different vaccines, countries, and regions. This calls attention to the persistent inequities in accessing life-saving vaccines.

One-fourth of the world's infants—almost 25 million annually—still lack access to rubella vaccines. In addition, from 2019 to 2022, the percentage of children who received their first dose of a measles vaccine declined from 86% to 83%. In 2022, 21.9 million children missed their first measles vaccine dose, while 11 million missed their second measles dose. Many of these children live in low-income countries with health systems that face persistent challenges in reaching all children with vaccines. Dr. Kate O’Brien, the director of immunization at the WHO, refers to the lack of measles vaccine coverage as an alarm bell for action, adding, “Children everywhere have the right to be protected by the life-saving measles vaccine, no matter where they live.”

Without concerted efforts across countries, the risk of measles spreading remains high, placing children everywhere at risk of joining the estimated 156,000 people—mostly children—who died from the respiratory virus in 2022.

MEASLES OUTBREAKS INCREASE AS VACCINE GAPS WIDEN

Due to the significant number of children missing measles vaccinations in the last two years, the number of large or disruptive measles outbreaks increased by 86% between 2021 and 2022. According to Dr. John Vertelieve, director of the Global Immunization Division at the CDC, “the increase in measles outbreaks and deaths is staggering, but unfortunately not unexpected given the declining vaccination rates we’ve seen in the past few years.”

Thirty-seven countries in four WHO regions were affected by large or disruptive outbreaks. Measles outbreaks most often occur in un- or under-vaccinated communities, outbreaks point to weaknesses and inequities in immunization programs and other essential health services. Institutional and security-related barriers contribute to low coverage rates of migrant, refugee, or other displaced communities. These barriers prevent a large and growing challenge for preventing and responding to measles outbreaks. “Viruses like measles do not recognize borders,” said Ms. Catherine Russell, executive director of UNICEF.

Immigration efforts must be strengthened to prevent outbreaks and ensure all children receive life-saving vaccines.

ERADICATING RUBELLA AND ENDING CRS IS POSSIBLE

Rubella-containing vaccines have been introduced in 95 countries throughout the world. Despite this progress, there are still an estimated 32,000 children born each year with congenital rubella syndrome (CRS). We must do more to ensure no child is born with CRS.

Rubella elimination and ending CRS are only possible when all countries provide access to rubella vaccines. Currently, 19 countries—most in the WHO African Region—have yet to include the rubella-containing vaccine in immunization programs. It is up to the international community to advocate for and support these countries to make rubella immunizations part of routine healthcare.

INNOVATING IMMUNIZATIONS

While countries continue to work tirelessly to reach all children with vaccines, this remains a challenge. Measles and rubella vaccines require careful refrigeration—no small feat in rural communities without consistent electricity. These vaccines also require an injection to needle and syringe only administered by trained health workers. Our partners are working on innovative methods of delivery that aim to improve vaccination accessibility, coverage, and equity. For example, for the last decade partners have been developing a new injection-free vaccine delivery technology—supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the CDC. The measles and rubella vaccine microneedle patch is showing promising results.

Children everywhere have the right to be protected by the life-saving measles vaccine, no matter where they live.

looking forward

The Measles & Rubella Initiative (M&RI) includes the M&RI partners’ response to global setbacks that threaten gains made against rubella and measles. Organizations such as Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation played a key role in vaccinating 67,690,401 children with rubella vaccines, showing promising results.

The Measles & Rubella Initiative (M&RI) is committed to defending and supporting high-quality immunization services, innovating vaccine technologies, coordinating vaccination campaigns, and improving laboratories, capacity, and equity. The Measles & Rubella Initiative (M&RI) is committed to defending and supporting high-quality immunization services, innovating vaccine technologies, coordinating vaccination campaigns, and improving laboratories, capacity, and equity.

The Measles Outbreaks Response and Collaboration (M&RP) is driving elimination efforts through support for the scaling up of high-quality immunization services, innovating vaccine technologies, coordinating vaccination campaigns, and improving laboratories, capacity, and equity.

We need robust investments that ensure measles vaccines are safely delivered. Global immunization partners must support country activities for measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases can and should safely continue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2022, the Measles & Rubella Initiative transformed into the Measles & Rubella Partnership (M&RP) and expanded to include Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. We stand ready to support countries, working in collaboration to ensure every child receives life-saving vaccines,” said Dr. Mary Agopy, director of the Measles & Rubella Partnership at the American Red Cross.

Reflecting on the increase in measles cases and deaths, Ms. Lon Sloat, senior director of global health at the United Nations Foundations, reminds us that there have been tremendous strides. “Before a measles vaccine was available globally, 2.6 million people, mostly children, were dying every year from this disease whereas in 2022, we’ve made immense progress since then, and we cannot let it stop now.”

M&RP is driving elimination efforts through support for the scaling up of high-quality immunization services, innovating vaccine technologies, coordinating vaccination campaigns, and improving laboratories, capacity, and equity.

In 2022, the M&RP provided support for outbreak responses in 25 countries, vaccinating more than 11 million children. The speed of support is critical. Recognizing this, the M&RP is committed to defending and supporting high-quality immunization services, and we work with the Government of the Measles & Rubella Initiative (M&RI) to meet the challenges we face.

In a recent interview with NPR, Dr. David Robomin, deputy director of vaccination development and surveillance at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation said, “For many reasons, we think the vaccine patch really has the potential to help us reach more children and to accomplish our mission, which is to save lives.”

For more information:

www.measlesrubellainitiative.org

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2020

ANNUAL

SUMMARY

From Initiative to Partnership

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We need robust investments that ensure measles vaccines are safely delivered. Global immunization partners must support country activities for measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases can and should safely continue during the COVID-19 pandemic.
The goal: Disease elimination requires greater than or equal to 95% coverage for both doses of the measles and rubella-containing vaccine.

We’ve made progress:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measles Vaccination</th>
<th>Rubella Vaccine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Dose Coverage</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Dose Coverage</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved &gt;95%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Global vaccination coverage rates for 2022:

- First Measles Vaccine Dose: 83%
- Second Measles Vaccine Dose: 74%
- Rubella Vaccine: 68%

Children pay the price when communities lack immunity:

- In 2022, 21.9 million children missed their first dose of the measles vaccine, while 11 million missed their second dose.
- In 2022, an estimated 136,200 people died of measles complications—most of them children.
- 25% of the world’s children lack access to the rubella vaccine.
- Each year, an estimated 32,000 children are born with congenital rubella syndrome, a leading cause of vaccine-preventable birth defects.

The threat of dying from measles or being born with congenital rubella syndrome depends on where you live:

- There were 37 large and disruptive measles outbreaks in 2022, with 86% of them occurring in low- and lower-middle-income countries.
- In low-income countries where the threat of measles mortality is greatest, vaccination rates are only 66%.
- 18 of the 19 countries that have not introduced the rubella-containing vaccine are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Working toward our goals:

- 19 countries have yet to introduce the rubella-containing vaccine in their routine immunization programs. M&RP is working with countries to include this vaccine as part of basic healthcare.
- M&RP partnered with 44 countries to run vaccination campaigns in 2022. As a result, 115 million children received vaccinations.