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Measles Initiative highlights the importance of adherence to global goals and strategies

In light of recent reports in the media concerning measles outbreaks, the Measles Initiative clarifies global goals and underlines the importance of full implementation of the recommended control strategies.

No target date has been established for achieving the global eradication of measles. Member States attending the World Health Assembly in 2010 endorsed the following global measles control targets for 2015 as milestones towards the eventual eradication of measles:

- to exceed 90% coverage with the first dose of measles-containing vaccine nationally and exceed 80% vaccination coverage in every district or equivalent administrative unit;
- to reduce annual reported measles incidence to less than five cases per million and maintain that level; and
- to reduce measles mortality by 95% or more in comparison with 2000 estimates.

The strategies for achieving these goals are: achieving and maintaining high population immunity through delivery of two doses of measles vaccine to all children; effective laboratory-backed disease surveillance; and effective treatment of measles cases including administration of vitamin A.

Consistent implementation of these strategies has resulted in substantial progress in reducing deaths from measles — by 78%, from an estimated 733 000 deaths in 2000 to an estimated 164 000 deaths in 2008. In 2008, global routine coverage with the first dose of measles-containing vaccine reached 83%, an increase from 72% in 2000. In 2008, more than 110 million children received measles vaccine through mass immunization campaigns in the 47 priority countries identified as having a high measles mortality burden in 2000. The reduction of measles deaths worldwide is advancing progress on Millennium Development Goal 4 — to reduce child mortality.

However, significant challenges to further progress remain. These include: competing public health priorities; weak immunization systems; sustaining high routine vaccination coverage; addressing the funding gap of almost US\$ 300 million for the 47 priority countries if the 2015 goals are to be met; vaccinating hard-to-reach populations; and addressing an increasing number of measles outbreaks.

In the past 12 months (from July 2009 to June 2010), measles outbreaks have occurred in over 30 African countries, resulting in more than 89 000 reported measles cases and nearly 1400 reported measles deaths. The majority of measles cases in these outbreaks have occurred among children who have never been vaccinated, indicating that lack of vaccination is the underlying cause. The recent outbreaks serve as a stark reminder of the risks of not achieving very high vaccination coverage (>95%) through routine services and mass immunization campaigns. Commitment by countries with a high burden of measles and all partners working on measles activities to agreed goals and strategies will be the cornerstone of all efforts.

Related links

Measles Initiative

<http://www.measlesinitiative.org/>

More on measles

<http://www.who.int/topics/measles/en/index.html>

WHO and UNICEF concerned about measles outbreak in Eastern and Southern Africa

http://www.who.int/immunization/newsroom/WHO_UNICEF_press_release_measles_outbreaks_18jun10.pdf

Global eradication of measles - Information note for the media - 21 May 2010

http://www.who.int/immunization/newsroom/measles_press_note_21may2010.pdf