



Fact Sheet

Measles: Making Progress for Children



Mass Immunization campaigns have been an effective strategy for combating measles, the most vaccine-preventable childhood disease. PHOTO: PHOTOSHARE/George Onyango

Nigeria: A Lifesaving Campaign

Measles kills more children in Nigeria than any other vaccine preventable disease. In 2005, routine measles immunization coverage was below 50 percent, thus it was crucial to immunize all children. Supported by the Nigerian government, the Measles Initiative, and partners, sub-national measles immunization campaigns were held in December of that year in the 20 northern states. Over 140,000 people were mobilized, including health staff and community leaders who set up 24,000 vaccination posts in the villages. Out of a total population of 140 million, 30 million children from 9 months to 15 years were reached in one week.¹⁰

A second phase of measles immunization campaigns was launched in October 2006. This time 29 million children were targeted in the 17 southern states, aided by 100,000 workers and the establishment of 18,000 vaccination posts. Many of the children in both campaigns lived in areas that were difficult to reach through routine services. Health workers and volunteers used boats and trekked across rugged terrain and waters to get to these children. Nearly 56 million children were immunized in the overall campaign in one of the largest efforts against measles in the world.¹¹

Since 1999, deaths from measles have declined nearly 60 percent.¹ Despite this achievement, progress still needs to be made in the fight against one of the world's most contagious diseases. About 4 percent of the more than 10 million deaths in children under 5 result from measles or related complications from severe diarrhea, pneumonia, and encephalitis.²

Measles is an acute viral illness transmitted through coughing or sneezing.³ A safe and effective vaccine has been available for 40 years but many countries have not yet achieved sufficient coverage to prevent measles transmission.⁴ Measles outbreaks occur largely in tropical and/or densely populated areas where susceptible children live in close proximity. Those who have not been immunized with the measles vaccine or have not acquired immunity from previous exposure to the disease face greater risk of becoming infected. Those with weakened immune systems from malnutrition, HIV/AIDS, a lack of Vitamin A, or other diseases, are more likely to contract the virus.⁵

Good case management for measles helps alleviate the severity of the illness. Improving nutrition, treating dehydration with oral rehydration solution, and giving antibiotics for infections helps reduce the symptoms. Measles vaccinations, which are safe and cost-effective at less than one U.S. dollar per child, prevent the majority of measles cases.⁶ Maintaining vaccination coverage levels above 90 percent will have a huge impact on stopping the transmission of the virus.⁷

The WHO/UNICEF Global Immunization Vision and Strategy serves as the blueprint for countries striving to reduce measles deaths 90 percent by 2010. It ensures routine immunization, provides a 'second opportunity' for measles immunization (e.g., campaigns and booster doses), improves surveillance, and strengthens clinical management of measles cases.⁸ Since its launch in 2001, the Measles Initiative, a partnership of the Red Cross, the UN Foundation, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, WHO, and UNICEF, has supported vaccination campaigns to rapidly reduce measles mortality.⁹ To sustain these achievements and the impact of the campaigns, countries and partners need to continue to strengthen their routine immunization systems.

For more information, visit us at www.child-survival.org

1 WHO. 2007. "How Big a Problem is Measles?" <http://www.who.int/features/qa/53/en/index.html>, viewed on July 6, 2007.

2 Ruden, Igor, Shams El Arifeen, Robert E. Black, and Harry Campbell. 2007. "Childhood Pneumonia: Setting Our Priorities Right." *Lancet Infect Dis*; 7:56-61.

3 WHO. 2007. "Measles." <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs286/en/>, viewed on July 6, 2007.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 WHO. 2001. "WHO-UNICEF Joint Statement on Strategies to Reduce Measles Mortality Worldwide." <http://www.who.int/vaccines-documents/DocsPDF01/www667.pdf>, viewed on July 6, 2007.

8 WHO, 2007.

9 Measles Initiative. 2006. "Fast Facts." <http://www.measlesinitiative.org/facts2.asp>, viewed on July 6, 2007.

10 UNICEF. 2005. "Nigeria Completes Africa's Largest Ever Measles Campaign." http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/nigeria_30483.html, viewed on July 6, 2007.

11 UNICEF. 2006. "Measles Immunization Campaign Targets 29 Million Nigerian Children." http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/nigeria_36211.html, viewed on June 22, 2007.