

Global progress against measles threatened amidst COVID-19 pandemic

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While reported measles cases have fallen compared to previous years, progress toward measles elimination continues to decline and the risk of outbreaks is mounting, according to a new report from the World Health Organization (WHO) and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

During 2020, more than 22 million infants missed their first dose of measles vaccine - 3 million more than in 2019, marking the largest increase in two decades and creating dangerous conditions for outbreaks to occur.

Compared with the previous year, reported measles cases decreased by more than 80 percent in 2020.

However, measles surveillance also deteriorated with the lowest number of specimens sent for laboratory testing in over a decade. Weak measles monitoring, testing and reporting for measles jeopardize countries' ability to prevent outbreaks of this highly infectious disease.

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The ability of countries to ensure children receive both recommended doses of measles vaccine is a key indicator of global progress toward measles elimination and capacity to prevent the spread of the virus. First-dose coverage fell in 2020, and only 70 percent of children received their second dose measles vaccine, well below the 95 percent coverage needed to protect communities from the spread of the measles virus.

Adding to the worsening of immunity gaps worldwide, 24 measles vaccination campaigns in 23 countries, originally planned for 2020, were postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic - leaving more than 93 million people at risk for the disease.