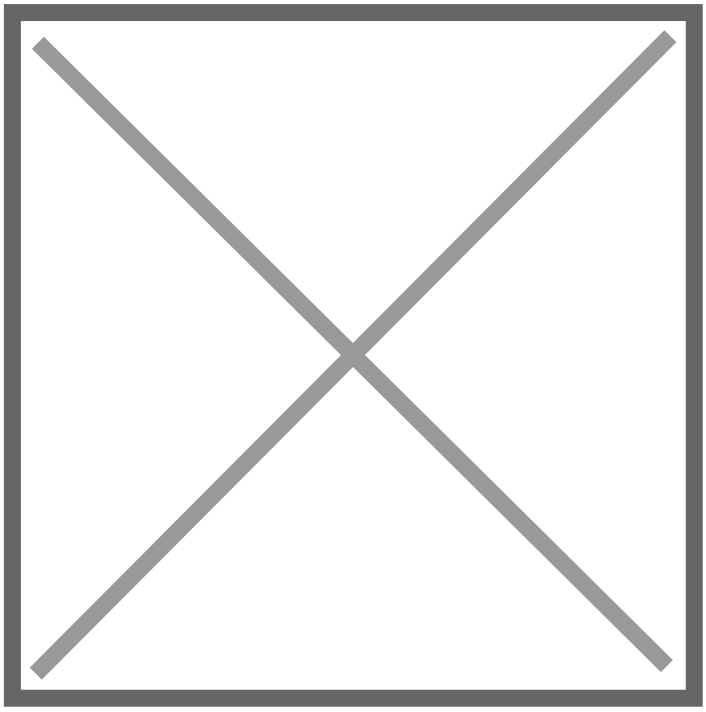
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Measles deaths decline by 78%: WHO

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Death by measles has reached historic lows, dropping by 78 percent from more than 562,000 in 2000 to 122,000 in 2012, according to a report by WHO. According to the report, measles vaccination has prevented an estimated 13.8 million deaths in this period and the reported cases declined 77 percent from 853,480 to 226,722.

These gains are a result of global routine measles immunization coverage holding steady at 84 percent and 145 countries having introduced a routine second dose of measles vaccine to ensure immunity and prevent outbreaks. In addition to routine immunization, countries vaccinated 145 million children during mass campaigns against measles in 2012 and reached more than 1 billion since 2000, with the support of the Measles & Rubella Initiative, a joint initiave by American Red Cross, United Nations Foundation, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), UNICEF and WHO.

Despite the impressive gains made, progress towards measles elimination remains uneven with some populations still unprotected. Measles continues to be a global threat, with five of six WHO regions still experiencing large outbreaks and with the Region of the Americas responding to many importations of measles cases. The African, Eastern Mediterranean and European regions are not likely to meet their measles elimination targets on time. The Region of the Americas has achieved measles elimination and continues to maintain this status while the Western Pacific region is approaching its target.

Routine measles vaccination coverage is an important progress indicator towards meeting Millennium Development Goal Four because of its potential to reduce child mortality and widely recognized as a marker of access to children's health services.

Without improved immunization coverage both through routine services and mass campaigns, outbreaks will continue to occur, hampering efforts to meet global elimination targets and prevent additional deaths. The ability to contain outbreaks by improving routine coverage and, when necessary, implementing high quality vaccination campaigns requires countries to place a high priority on elimination goals and to invest heavily in health systems improvements.

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