

South-East Asia aims to eliminate measles by 2020

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Over 70,700 children died of measles in the South-East Asia region in 2011 which was about 45% of global measles deaths. World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that US\$ 800 million are needed to achieve this goal by 2020. Now, the countries from this region have jointly expressed their commitment to meet the immediate requirements in tackling the disease.

"An estimated 8 million children are not protected against measles in WHO's South-East Asia Region. The measles and rubella vaccines are safe, effective and inexpensive. The administration of a combined measles rubella vaccine can eliminate both diseases cost effectively" said Dr Samlee Plianbangchang, WHO's Regional Director for South-East Asia, "Measles outbreaks are a major development obstacle. I believe that with political will and by focussing on the vulnerable and hard to reach populations, we can eliminate measles and control rubella in South-East Asia Region by 2020."

In order to reach the goal of measles elimination and rubella control, governments will need to achieve and maintain 95% population immunity against measles and rubella within each district through routine immunization and/or supplementary campaigns. Countries will also need to develop and sustain a sensitive and timely case-based measles and rubella/CRS surveillance system. The regional network of accredited measles and rubella laboratories needs to be expanded and strengthened. Strategic plans are being developed by all countries in the region. These plans will need to be adequately funded and human resources allocated.

Significant progress has already been made toward this ambitious goal. Countries of the region have already achieved a 63% decline in the measles incidence rate from 69.9 per million to 25 per million population between 2000 and 2011.

"We have demonstrated that polio eradication is possible even under challenging circumstances. Infrastructure and lessons learned from that historic achievement can play a critical role in achieving measles elimination," said Dr Samlee.

Country efforts in the South-East Asian Region have led to a 48% decline in measles deaths between 2000 and 2011. Although the current rate of progress in the region may not be fast enough to achieve the World Health Assembly target of

reducing measles deaths by 95% by 2015, the stage is now set for acceleration of measles and rubella control strategies. If implemented this would allow the region to achieve the 2020 elimination goal. WHO is urging partners to reinvigorate commitments and support governments by filling financial and technical gaps to achieve the target of eliminating measles from the region by 2020.