

Is India lagging in measles vaccination?

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Context:

A new report from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said measles cases in 2022 have increased by 18%, compared to 2021.

Findings on measles in India:

1. India's Union Health Ministry has refuted a part of the report which said that globally 22 million children did not get their first measles shot in 2022 and that half of them live in 10 countries including India, where an estimated 1.1 million infants did not get the first dose of the vaccine.
2. According to the WHO, measles vaccination averted 56 million deaths between 2000 and 2021. Additionally in 2022, about 83% of the world's children received one dose of measles vaccine by their first birthday through routine health services — the lowest since 2008.
3. Health Ministry maintains that just over 21,000 Indian children did not get the shot in FY 2022-23 and that catchup vaccinations are going on in the states. The ministry also said that the WHO data is based on an estimated number, reported under the WHO UNICEF Estimates National Immunization Coverage (WUENIC) 2022 report.

About measles:

1. Measles is a contagious disease caused by a virus, which spreads through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Measles starts with a cough, runny nose, red eyes, and fever. Then a rash of tiny, red spots break out. It starts at the head and spreads to the rest of the body.
2. Measles can be prevented with the MMR vaccine. The vaccine protects against three diseases — measles, mumps and rubella. Two doses of MMR vaccine are about 97% effective at preventing measles; one dose is about 93% effective.

Universal Immunisation Programme:

1. India's UIP is one of the largest public health programmes in the world targeting close to 2.67 crore newborns and 2.9 crore pregnant women annually.
2. However, due to interruption of routine vaccination during and post-COVID pandemic, India did see several outbreaks of measles in different parts of the country. While the pace of routine immunisation has slowed down due to Covid-19, IMI 4.0 is filling the gaps towards universal immunisation.

Impact of COVID-19 on the vaccination programme:

1. The WHO notes that the pandemic has led to setbacks in surveillance and immunisation efforts across the globe leaving millions of children vulnerable to diseases like measles.

2. "No country is exempt from measles, and areas with low immunisation encourage the virus to circulate, increasing the likelihood of outbreaks and putting all unvaccinated children at risk," WHO notes.
3. In India, as recently as late last year, Maharashtra and Kerala saw a spike in cases of measles. While Maharashtra recorded over 800 cases and over 10 deaths linked to the disease, Kerala's Malappuram district reported 160 cases of measles.

Conclusion:

The stakeholders of children's healthcare must take extra measures for routine and catch up measles vaccination to contain the disease in India.



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