



“Tragedy” of 35 deaths from measles in Europe last year is unacceptable, says WHO

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There were 21 315 cases of measles and 35 deaths recorded in Europe in 2017—a 400% increase on the previous year when there was a record low of 5273 cases, World Health Organization figures show.¹

Large outbreaks of measles (100 or more cases) have affected 15 of the 53 countries in the WHO European region, with the highest numbers seen in Romania (5562), Italy (5006), and Ukraine (4767). Vaccination rates (2nd dose) in these countries were 76%, 83%, and 31% respectively for 2016, the most recent year for which figures are available.²

These countries have been affected in recent years by declines in overall routine immunisation coverage, consistently low coverage among some marginalised groups, interruptions in vaccine supply, or underperforming disease surveillance systems, WHO said.

The UK was among the countries with a large outbreak with 282 cases last year, as were Greece (967), Germany (927), Serbia (702), Tajikistan (649), France (520), the Russian Federation (408), Belgium (369), Bulgaria (167), Spain (152), Czechia (146), and Switzerland (105), although many of these were in decline by the close of 2017.

Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe, said: “Every new person affected by measles in Europe reminds us that unvaccinated children and adults, regardless of where they live, remain at risk of catching the disease and spreading it to

others who may not be able to get vaccinated. Over 20 000 cases of measles, and 35 lives lost in 2017 alone, are a tragedy we simply cannot accept.”

She added: “Elimination of both measles and rubella is a priority goal that all European countries have firmly committed to, and a cornerstone for achieving the health related Sustainable Development Goals. This short term setback cannot deter us from our commitment to be the generation that frees our children from these diseases once and for all.”

WHO said that countries were tackling outbreaks by raising public awareness, immunising healthcare professionals and other adults at particular risk, tackling challenges in access, and improving supply planning and logistics.

The data were released ahead of a meeting on 20 February of 11 health ministers to discuss how to achieve the goals set out in the European Vaccine Action Plan by 2020, which include eliminating measles and rubella.

- 1 World Health Organization Europe. WHO EpiData, No. 1/2018. February 2018. www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/vaccines-and-immunization/publications/surveillance-and-data/who-epidata/who-epidata,-no.-12018.
- 2 World Health Organization. WHO-UNICEF estimates of DTP3 coverage. 15 July 2017. http://apps.who.int/immunization_monitoring/globalsummary/timeseries/tswucoveredtp3.html.

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