

# Measles Rubella Vaccine National Campaign

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India has attained impressive milestones through immunisation and continues with its efforts to achieve comprehensive immunisation coverage for a birth cohort of 27 million children through the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP). Immunisation is one of the most effective public health intervention strategies for protection of children especially under 5 years of age from life threatening conditions which are preventable. Despite high vaccination levels for each individual vaccines, India's full vaccination coverage levels has plateaued around 65% (RSOC 2013-14) in the last few years with slow progress thus contributing to continued high burden of morbidity and mortality in children from vaccine preventable diseases (VPDs).<sup>1</sup>

Measles is one of the most common vaccine preventable diseases among the under five children in India for which the country has been providing vaccination under the UIP since 1985 across all states. Measles is a major childhood killer disease and Rubella causes congenital Rubella syndrome (CRS) that is responsible for irreversible birth defects. This campaign launched with technical support from WHO Country Office for India and other stakeholders, is a major step towards reducing childhood mortality and addressing birth defects.

## ACTION PLAN 2017

South-East Asia Regional Countries have resolved (WHO SEAR resolution) to eliminate Measles and control Rubella/Congenital Rubella syndrome (CRS) by year 2020. India being a signatory is fully committed to it and in that direction, as per the recommendation of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI) in June, 2014 which has recommended the introduction of measles-rubella vaccine in routine immunization program, following a nation-wide MR campaign, and replacing both doses of measles vaccine at 9-12 months and 16-24 months with MR vaccine under routine immunization immediately.<sup>2</sup>

India launched one of the world's largest vaccination campaigns against measles and rubella on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2017. The campaign launched with technical support from WHO Country Office for India and other stakeholders, is a major step towards reducing childhood mortality and addressing birth defects.

MR vaccine introduction campaigns are being rolled out in a phased manner, targeting children aged 9 months to 15 years irrespective of their previous measles/MR vaccination status or history of measles or rubella illness.

Launched in five states/union territories – Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Goa and Lakshadweep covering nearly 3.6 crore children, the campaign is targeted at vaccinating more than 41 crore children in the age group of nine months to less than 15 years over the next two years across the country. This move demonstrates India's commitment to improve health and well being of people by protecting children against vaccine preventable diseases.

Through its National Public Health Surveillance Project (NPHSP), WHO is supporting the Government with microplanning, monitoring, preparedness and implementation of the MR campaign for quality and safety.

Under the Measles Rubella (MR) campaign, all children in the target group (between 9 months and less than 15 years) will be given a single shot of vaccine irrespective of their previous Measles/Rubella vaccination status or Measles/Rubella disease status. The campaign will cover public and private sector settings like schools and health facilities to reach out to children in the age group of nine months to less than 15 years.

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This additional campaign will boost the immunity of the child and protect the entire community by eliminating transmission of measles and rubella. This approach was a significant factor in achieving measles elimination in the Western Hemisphere (2002) and the elimination of indigenous rubella in 2009.

This vaccine will be provided free of cost. After completion of the campaign, MR vaccine will be introduced in routine immunisation and will replace measles vaccine given at 9-12 months and 16-24 months of age of child.

### **Vaccine hesitancy**

The goal of eliminating measles from Europe was dealt a blow last week after new data showed how new outbreaks continue to sweep the continent. Nearly 19,000 cases of measles were reported in the European Union between January 2016 and October 2017 including 44 deaths. These figures were collected by the European Centre for

Disease Prevention and Control. These figures were released as the centre steps up its initiatives in response to a rise in the so called “vaccine hesitancy” in Europe.<sup>3</sup> The Governments and doctors need to engage head on with parents over safety concerns.

### **END NOTE**

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**Conflict of Interest:** None declared

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