

Bhutan and Maldives Eliminate Measles: World Health Organization

Dear Editor,

Under the global mission to leave no one behind and attain universal health coverage, the policy makers and other stakeholders from the South-East Asia Region have focused their attention toward attaining elimination of measles and control of rubella by the year 2020.^[1-3] To achieve that a four-pronged strategy has been adopted comprising of accomplishing and sustaining a minimum of 95% coverage with couple of doses of measles-rubella vaccine, establishing an effective case-based surveillance to attain the set performance indicators, developing an accredited network of laboratories for diagnosing both the infections, and strengthening supportive services to ensure the success of the above-proposed interventions.^[1,3]

It is a matter of great pride that Bhutan and Maldives have successfully eliminated measles, much prior to the proposed regional target of 2020.^[1] The expanded immunization program was initiated in both the nations before 1980s and since then constant efforts have been taken to improve the reach of immunization services.^[1,3] Maldives and Bhutan have not reported any indigenous case of measles for the last 8 years and 5 years, respectively, and it is predominantly due to the strong political commitment, well supported by the concerted efforts of health workers and stakeholders at all levels.^[1,3]

In addition, the nations have established strong laboratory networks for surveillance, and extensive case investigation and tracking activities have been performed for each and every case, regardless of the geographical constraints.^[1,3] Furthermore, to sustain their gains, both nations have been organizing mass vaccination campaigns to cover vulnerable population groups.^[3] Moreover, all nations in the region have incorporated two doses of measles in their immunization schedule, and it is supplemented with surveillance activities for both the infections.^[1,2] In fact, in the year 2016 alone, due to the intensive immunization activities, close to 0.62 million measles-attributed deaths have been averted in the entire region.^[1]

However, the available estimates from the region clearly indicate that >4.5 million children are devoid of immunization against measles each year, which in itself is a great risk for reemergence of the disease in Bhutan and Maldives for starting a new chain of transmission.^[1,3] Thus, both the nations should continue the good work against measles and rubella and take appropriate measures to respond timely with any importations.^[1,2]

To conclude, elimination of measles from Bhutan and Maldives is a major public health accomplishment, but then

it is just the start of better public health outcome, and a lot needs to be done to accomplish the elimination of measles and control of rubella in the entire region.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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