

Current major event

Measles outbreak in Afghanistan

Since the beginning of year, a series of suspected measles outbreaks have been reported from different provinces in Afghanistan. As many as twenty out of the 34 provinces have recently reported suspected clusters of measles cases. A total of 741 suspected measles cases and 22 deaths (CFR 3%) have been reported till week 15 of 2021.

Editorial note

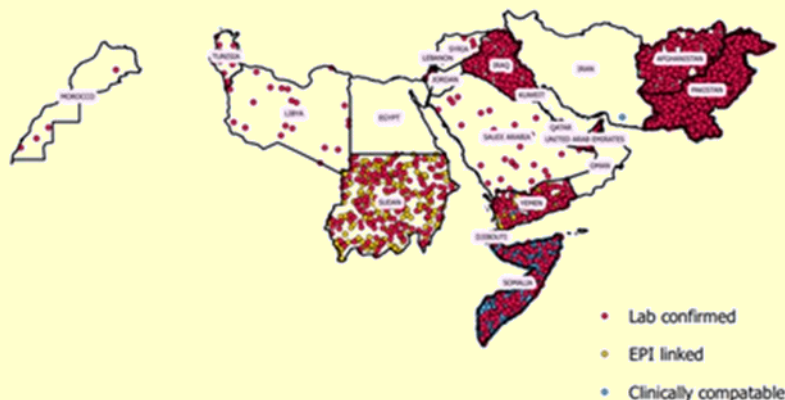
Measles is caused by a virus in the paramyxovirus family and is normally passed through direct contact and through the air. The virus infects the respiratory tract, then spreads throughout the body. Measles is a human disease and is not known to occur in animals. Before the introduction of the measles vaccine in 1963 and its widespread use, major epidemics occurred approximately every 2–3 years and measles caused an estimated 2.6 million deaths each year globally.

Measles is one of the leading causes of death among young children in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR), even though a safe and cost-effective vaccine is available. In the EMR, more than 26 000 cases of measles were reported in 2020 (*see map*), out of which 766 cases were reported from Afghanistan. A sudden rise in reported cases was observed at the start of the year 2021. A total of 741 suspected cases and 22 associated deaths (CFR 3%) were reported from 20 provinces out of a total of 34. Data for the past decade indicates that the country has been reporting multiple outbreaks every year.

During 2021, cases were reported from the northern, southern and eastern regions, with the most affected provinces being Paktika (131; 18%), Paktiya (105; 14%), Nooristan (57; 8%), Khost and Zabul (54 each; 7%) (*see table*). In addition, 22 associated deaths were reported mainly from four provinces, with the most affected being Nooristan which reported 77% of the total reported deaths (17 deaths), followed by Paktika 14% (3 deaths) and 5% (1 death) each from Jawzjan and Urozgan provinces. According to available data, the most affected age group is 1-5 years which represent 64% of the total cases reported. The sex distribution of the reported cases showed that males (53%) are more affected than females (47%).

Low immunization coverage among children, a weak immunization programme

Geographic distribution of measles cases in EMR countries, 2020



Source: http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/vpi/documents/measles_rubella_december_2020.pdf

Provinces reported suspected measles cases during 2021

Provinces	2021	Percentage of cases
Paktika	131	18%
Paktiya	105	14%
Nooristan	57	8%
Khost	54	7%
Zabul	54	7%
Kunar	45	6%
Helmand	43	6%
Urozgan	40	5%
Badakhshan	37	5%
Ghazni	32	4%
Farah	28	4%
Jawzjan	20	3%
Balkh	19	3%
Kandahar	18	2%
Hirat	16	2%
Parwan	13	2%
Nimroz	9	1%
Logar	8	1%
Nangarhar	7	1%
Kapisa	5	1%
Total	741	100%

in the country and inadequate surveillance due to lack of access to health services in security-compromised areas are leading to low population immunity against measles resulting in the build-up of excessive susceptibility. The recurrence of measles outbreaks as seen in Afghanistan in recent time are, presumably, due to these factors.

Measles is almost entirely preventable through two doses of a safe and effective vaccine. In the current situation, it's imperative to implement nation-wide supplementary immunization campaigns to address immunity gaps and interrupt transmission, in addition to increasing social mobilization activities to enhance acceptance and the participation of the local communities in the campaigns.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

COVID-19 in 22 EMR countries

Current public health events of concern

[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), CFR %]

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): 2019-2021

Afghanistan	[60 300 (2642), 4.4%]
Bahrain	[177 997 (648), 0.4%]
Djibouti	[11 121 (145), 1.3%]
Egypt	[228 584 (13 402), 5.9%]
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	[2 516 157 (72 090), 2.9%]
Iraq	[1 070 366 (15498), 1.4%]
Jordan	[712 077 (8871), 1.2%]
Kuwait	[275 270 (1569), 0.6%]
Lebanon	[527 508 (7302), 1.4%]
Libya	[177 871 (3039), 1.7%]
Morocco	[511 562 (9026), 1.8%]
occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)	[325 967 (3525), 1.1%]
Oman	[193 253 (2010), 1%]
Pakistan	[829 933 (10 070), 2.2%]
Qatar	[206 302 (465), 0.2%]
Saudi Arabia	[418 411 (6968), 1.7%]
Somalia	[13 915 (713), 5.1%]
Sudan	[33 944 (2349), 6.9%]
Syrian Arab Republic	[22 818 (1598), 7%]
Tunisia	[311 743 (10 868), 3.5%]
United Arab Emirates	[521 948 (1591), 0.3%]
Yemen	[6329 (1230), 19.4%]