

Current major event

Measles outbreak in northwest Syrian Arab Republic

On December 2021, the early warning, alert and response network (EWARN) detected an increased number of measles cases in Albad district, in northwest Syria, and the outbreak spread to other areas. WHO, in collaboration with partners, has implemented response activities to contain the outbreak.

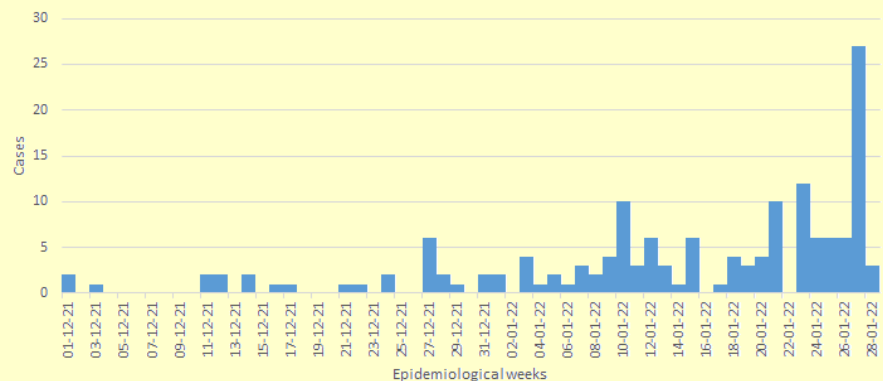
Editorial note

Measles is a highly contagious disease that is caused by a virus in the paramyxovirus family and it is normally passed through direct contact and through the air. The virus infects the respiratory tract, then spreads throughout the body. It is usually manifested by fever and rash. Measles can cause serious complications, including pneumonia and encephalitis, and can lead to death. Accelerated immunization activities have had a major impact on reducing measles deaths.

Since December 2021, EWARN in northwest Syria reported an increased number of suspected measles cases in Albad district, Aleppo governorate. As of 31 January 2022, a total of 240 suspected cases and two associated deaths (case-fatality ratio of 0.4%) were reported from Aleppo governorate. The most affected district is Albad followed by Afrin and Azaz (55.8%, 30% and 13.2% respectively). Camps of internally-displaced persons reported 44.6% of suspect measles cases. Male to female ratio is 1.8. Most of the reported cases (76%) are below the age of five years, out of whom 34% are under one year of age. A total of 115 cases (48%) are laboratory confirmed while 25 cases (10%) are epidemiologically linked to confirmed case. Regarding the vaccination status, 66% of cases reported not to have received any measles-containing vaccine (MCV) doses while 15% have had one dose and 15% had two doses.

WHO collaborated with partners such as the Assistance Coordination Unit, the Syria Immunization Group and Médecins Sans Frontières to respond and contain to the outbreak. Active case-finding and enhanced surveillance activities were implemented for the early detection of cases. Proper case management and referral mechanism were ensued. All suspected cases were given Vitamin A supplements to prevent complications. Community engagement activities were

Suspected measles cases by community, northwest Syria, 2022



Distribution of reported measles cases by classification, northwest Syria, 2022

Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Discarded	49	20.42%
Measles clinically	5	2.08%
Measles lab-confirmed	115	47.92%
Measles PendClass	45	18.75%
Rubella lab-confirmed	1	0.42%
Measles epi-linked	25	10.42%
Total	240	100%

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): 2019–2022

Afghanistan	[161 666 (7407), 7.6%]
Bahrain	[362 022 (1404), 0.4%]
Djibouti	[15 440 (189), 1.2%]
Egypt	[421 478 (22 566), 5.4%]
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	[6 344 179 (132 424), 2.1%]
Iraq	[2 203 365 (24 376), 1.1%]
Jordan	[1 197 250 (13 174), 1.1%]
Kuwait	[534 062 (2494), 0.5%]
Lebanon	[907 824 (576), 1.1%]
Libya	[425 237 (6007), 1.4%]
Morocco	[1 129 140 (15 328), 1.4%]
occupied Palestinian territory	[516 059 (5087), 1.0%]
Oman	[336 460 (4116), 1.2%]
Pakistan	[1 417 991 (29 248), 2.1%]
Qatar	[337 638 (645), 0.2%]
Saudi Arabia	[683 053 (8936), 1.3%]
Somalia	[25 388 (1335), 5.3%]
Sudan	[57 632 (3441), 6.0%]
Syrian Arab Republic	[51 284 (2984), 5.8%]
Tunisia	[901 107 (26 229), 2.9%]
United Arab Emirates	[840 739 (2239), 0.3%]
Yemen	[11 019 (2011), 18.3%]

implemented to increase vaccine acceptance and community awareness regarding preventive measures to decrease the risk of acquiring measles infection.

Outbreak response immunization campaign was conducted targeting 65 720 children aged from six month to 10 years. The emergency measles campaign lasted for nine days followed by two days of mop-up activities. A total of 47 061 children were vaccinated (72% coverage).

Effective immunization is the only cost-effective measure for measles control. In northwest Syria, coverage for one dose of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (MMR1) is low in some districts especially in Aleppo where there is also a high dropout from the second MCV dose (MCV2). The last supplementary immunization campaign was conducted in 2018 with 88% coverage. Since 2013, recurrent measles outbreaks were reported every three years. According to the measles immunity profile in northwest Syria, by 31 December 2021 the number of measles-susceptible children under five years of age were 199 874, which is 1.2 times the size of a birth cohort. The proportion of those susceptible are estimated to reach 50% of the children under five years. WHO and partners are planning to conduct a nationwide campaign to prevent measles outbreak and protect children in northwest Syria. However, it is critical to enhance and maintain routine vaccination in that region.