



# Measles and Rubella in WHO SEAR

## Why in News

Recently, the Maldives and Sri Lanka have become the first two countries in the [World Health Organisation's South-East Asian Region](#) (WHO SEAR) to have eliminated both measles and rubella ahead of the 2023 deadline.

- In September 2019, member countries of WHO SEAR [set 2023 as the target](#) for the elimination of measles and rubella.

## Key Points

- The announcement came after the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the **SEAR Verification Commission for Measles and Rubella Elimination**.
  - The Commission comprises **11 independent international experts** in the fields of epidemiology, virology and public health.
  - **Bhutan, DPR Korea and Timor-Leste** are countries in the region which have **eliminated measles**.
  - **Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste** have **controlled Rubella**.
- **Criteria:**
  - A country is verified as having eliminated measles and rubella when there is no evidence of endemic transmission of the respective viruses for over three years in the presence of a well-performing surveillance system.
    - The Maldives reported its last endemic case of measles in 2009 and of rubella in October 2015.
    - Sri Lanka reported the last endemic case of measles in May 2016 and of rubella in March 2017.
- **Steps Taken:**
  - All countries in the region **introduced two doses of measles-containing vaccine** and **at least one dose of rubella-containing vaccine** in their routine immunisation programme.
  - Since 2017, nearly **500 million additional children have been vaccinated** with measles and rubella-containing vaccines.
  - **Surveillance** for measles and rubella has been **strengthened further**.
- The announcement comes amidst the [Covid-19 pandemic](#) and the success demonstrates the importance of joint efforts.
  - Globally, more than half of all countries **reported moderate-to-severe disruptions** or a **total suspension of vaccination** services in March and April.
  - Regionally, **both immunisation coverage and surveillance were impacted**.
  - However, SEAR countries made **coordinated efforts to resume immunisation and surveillance** activities.

## Measles

- It is a **highly contagious viral disease** and is a cause of death among young children globally.
- It is particularly **dangerous for children** from the economically weaker background, as it **attacks malnourished children and those with reduced immunity**.
- It can cause **serious complications**, including **blindness, encephalitis, severe diarrhoea, ear infection and pneumonia**.

## Rubella

- It is also called **German Measles**.
- Rubella is a **contagious, generally mild viral infection** that occurs most often in **children and young adults**.
- Rubella infection in **pregnant women may cause death or congenital defects** known as **Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS)** which causes irreversible birth defects.

## Measures and Vaccinations

- The [Measles and Rubella Initiative](#) is a global program which aims at eliminating both these diseases.
- The **vaccine** for the diseases are provided in the form of **measles-rubella (MR)**, **measles-mumps-rubella (MMR)** or **measles-mumps-rubella-varicella (MMRV)** combination.

## India and Measles

- **Incidence:**
  - Despite the availability of a safe and effective vaccine since the 1960s, both measles and rubella are **major public health concerns** in India.
  - More than 1.3 million children acquire **measles infection** and around 49000 infected children die each year, contributing nearly 36% to the global figures.
  - **Rubella infection** in pregnant women may cause fetal death or congenital defects. It leads to the development of birth defects in almost 40,000 children annually in the country.
- **Government Initiatives:**
  - **Measles-Rubella Vaccination**
    - The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** launched the MR Vaccination program in 2017.
    - The MR campaign **targets around 41 crore children** across the country, the largest ever in any campaign.
    - All **children aged between 9 months and less than 15 years** are given a single shot of MR vaccination irrespective of their previous measles/rubella vaccination status or measles/rubella disease status.
    - MR vaccines are **provided free-of-cost** across the states.
  - Other Initiatives include [Universal Immunization Programme \(UIP\)](#), [Mission Indradhanush](#) and [Intensified Mission Indradhanush](#).

[Source: BL](#)

