



Measles Press Release No.1 14th of July 2022

Ministry of Health conducts catch-up immunization campaign to protect against vaccine-preventable diseases outbreaks in Vanuatu

Vaccination coverage data in Vanuatu for 2021 showed a significant decrease in routine immunization coverage since 2020 for all vaccines. Disruptions related to COVID-19 during the last two and a half years have contributed to this situation as resources were diverted to prepare and respond to the pandemic.

Routine immunization of children under one year provide the best protection against vaccine-preventable diseases, such as, measles, diphtheria, pertussis (also called whooping cough), polio, respiratory infections, and diarrhoea.

The drop in the national measles vaccination coverage to 50% is particularly alarming, as coverage of 95% or above with two doses of the safe and effective measles vaccine is needed to provide 99% of protection for children and develop herd immunity. Measles is a serious viral infection with risks of complications and severe illness, particularly a threat among children under the age of 5.

Across multiple countries globally in early 2022, there has been an increase of measles cases compared to 2021. Recently in June 2022, measles cases have been reported in Fiji and Australia. With the reopening of international borders to tourists and quarantine-free entry, **the risk of introduction of measles and of subsequent outbreaks in Vanuatu is very high.**

There is a need to increase the population's immunity through immunization to avoid any future outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.

"The Ministry of Health emphasizes the importance and benefit of routine immunization for children under 5, women of reproductive age and pregnant women", states Acting Director of Public Health, Dr. Jenny Stephens. "All parents and caregivers must ensure that their children are fully vaccinated in their first year of life".

The Ministry of Health is conducting a catch-up campaign in priority areas and strengthening routine immunization in healthcare facilities. The catch-up campaign targets all children aged 6 months to 5 years with one dose of the measles vaccine and other missed routine vaccines.

Malaria and Measles integrated campaigns are being conducted in targeted areas to increase vaccination coverage for all vaccines with a specific focus on measles.

Focus on measles

Measles is a highly infectious and serious disease caused by a virus. It is highly contagious and spreads from person to person. The main symptoms include fever and a skin rash.

Transmission of measles.

Measles can spread easily to one person to another. It can be spread through cough and sneeze, through close contact of direct contact with an infected person. The virus can remain active in the air or on surfaces for up to 2 hours. It can be transmitted by an infected person four (4) days prior to the onset of rash and four (4) days after the rash erupts. Measles outbreak can result in deaths, especially children.



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Signs and Symptoms of measles

The first sign is usually a high fever that begins about 10 to 12 days after exposure to the virus and it can last up to between four(4) and seven (7) days. Symptoms include running nose, cough, red and watery eyes, and small white spot inside the cheeks. Serious complication can occur, includes blindness, brain swelling, severe diarrhoea and dehydration, ear infection, and severe respiratory infection.

Prevention and Treatment of measles

Measles is a viral infection and has no specific treatment available. Disease management with good nutrition and rehydration is purely supportive to prevent complications.

Vaccination with the measles vaccine is the best way to protect your child from measles. The vaccine is safe effective and provides long-lasting protection and saves lives.

The Ministry of Health will provide more information as the situation evolves.

Signature:



Dr. Jenny Stephens
Acting Director of Public Health

Note to editors

For more information go to:

- [Your closest health facility]
- Ministry of Health, Health Promotions Vanuatu Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Health-Promotions-Vanuatu-167426667566197/>

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