

Sri Lanka and Maldives Declared Measles Free

July 10, 2020

WHO declared that Measles and Rubella have been eradicated from Sri Lanka and the Maldives after decades of immunisation programmes. The Maldives recorded its last endemic case of measles in 2009 and rubella in October 2015. Sri Lanka's last endemic cases of measles and rubella were reported in May 2016 and March 2017 respectively.

Measles Free Status

Elimination of Rubella made them the **first two countries in WHO South-East Asia region to achieve measles and rubella elimination ahead of the 2023 target**. The announcement was made after the fifth meeting of the South-East Asia Regional Verification Commission for Measles and Rubella Elimination, held virtually.

The Commission comprises **11 independent international experts in the fields of epidemiology, virology and public health**. A country is verified as having eliminated measles and rubella when there is **no evidence of endemic transmission of the measles and rubella viruses for over three years in the presence of a well performing surveillance system**.

Coming at a time when the entire world is grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, this success is encouraging and **demonstrates the importance of joint efforts** of the Ministries of Health, health workforce, partners, and most importantly the communities, who together contributed to this public health achievement.

In a global survey, more than half of all countries reported moderate-to-severe disruptions, or a total suspension of vaccination services in March and April due to COVID pandemic.

Preliminary information from the region suggests both immunization coverage and surveillance have been impacted. However, countries in WHO South-East Asia region have been making concerted efforts to resume immunization and surveillance activities and **plug gaps that have arisen.**

In recent years, all countries in the region introduced **two doses of measles-containing vaccine and at least one dose of rubella-containing vaccine in their routine immunization 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.