

Measles vaccines save 17 mn lives since 2000, but progress stalled: WHO

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Measles vaccines have saved more than 17 million lives in the past 15 years, the World Health Organization (WHO) said Thursday, warning though that immunisation coverage had marked time since 2010.

The number of [measles](#)-related deaths have plunged nearly 80 percent since the turn of the century, falling from 546,800 in 2000 to 114,900 last year, the UN's health agency said in a statement.

WHO said it estimated that 17.1 million lives had been saved since 2000, largely due to increased [vaccination coverage](#).

Measles is a highly contagious disease that causes a rash and fever, and can lead to complications ranging from brain damage to hearing loss and blindness. In rare cases, it can result in death.

During the first decade of the millennium, coverage with the first dose of the [measles vaccine](#) rose globally from 72 to 85 percent, it said, lamenting though that since 2010, the coverage rate has remained unchanged.

WHO recommends two doses of the vaccine.

"We cannot afford to drop our guard," Jean-Mari Okwo-Bele, head of WHO's immunisation and vaccines division, said in the statement.

"If children miss routine vaccination and are not reached by national

immunisation campaigns, we will not close the immunisation gap," he warned.

Last year, 221 million children around the globe received the measles shot.

But these efforts do not go far enough, insisted Robert Linkins of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"Globally, over 100,000 children needlessly died from measles last year. That's a tragedy which can be easily prevented if we intensify our measles surveillance and vaccination efforts," he said.

Measles remains common in many developing countries, particularly in parts of Africa and Asia, and more than 95 percent of all measles deaths happen in poor countries with weak health infrastructure.

But there have also been [measles outbreaks](#) in the United States and Europe in recent years, amid a rise in opposition to some routine vaccinations.

Many people who do not vaccinate their children say they fear a triple vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella is responsible for increasing cases of autism—a theory repeatedly disproven by various studies.

The controversy dates back to the publication of a now-debunked article in the *Lancet* medical journal in 1998.

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