

WHO: Maldives, Bhutan have eliminated measles

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The World Health Organization said Tuesday that Bhutan and the Maldives have eliminated measles, becoming the first countries in their region to stop the highly contagious disease.

The Maldives has not reported any case of indigenous measles since 2009, and Bhutan since 2012, WHO said.

"WHO commends them for this momentous public health achievement," said Poonam Khetrapal Singh, regional director of WHO Southeast Asia.

Bhutan and the Maldives launched [immunization programs](#) around 40 years ago with a strategy of [mass vaccination](#) of high-risk populations.

"The strongest political commitment, alongside the concerted efforts of health workers, officials and partners at all levels, has helped achieve this landmark success," Singh said.

WHO has set a deadline of 2020 for the elimination of measles in the 11 countries that it categorizes as the Southeast Asian region.

The region has averted an estimated 620,000 measles deaths in 2016 alone following vaccinations carried out by the 11 member countries, a WHO statement said.

Last year, North and South America were declared free of measles, but last month an outbreak was reported in Minnesota.

Measles, a viral disease which is spread through coughing and sneezing, can lead to pneumonia, brain inflammation, hospitalization or death, mainly among children.

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