

Dozens of toddlers die from malnutrition, measles in Papua

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Dozens of toddlers in Indonesia's easternmost Papua province have died from malnutrition and measles over the past few months, a military spokesman said Tuesday, underscoring a lack of accessible medical care in the remote region.

The high number of deaths comes after President Joko Widodo vowed in 2014 to beef up infrastructure on the island that is shared with Papua New Guinea.

At least 59 toddlers have died from a combination of measles and [malnutrition](#) in the remote Asmat [region](#), which has a severe shortage of doctors, said Papua military spokesman Muhammad Aidi.

"We received reports from the local health officials about" these deaths, he told AFP.

"We don't know for sure yet whether the malnutrition was caused by lack of food or by the parent's lack of knowledge regarding healthy food."

In response, the military has deployed medical teams and support staff to supply villagers with medicine, vaccines, medical equipment and nutritious [food](#), Aidi added.

About 129,000 people live in Asmat, a swampy region criss-crossed by rivers that can only be accessed by a flight from Papua's capital Jayapura

followed by a helicopter and boat ride.

"The region is disconnected from other parts of Papua because of a lack of infrastructure," Aidi said.

Indonesia annexed resource-rich Papua in the 1960s, but it remains poor with a low-level separatist insurgency carrying on for decades.

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