

Ukraine measles outbreak kills 11, infects 30,000

March 18 2019



An electron micrograph of the measles virus. Credit: CDC/ Courtesy of Cynthia S. Goldsmith

Eleven people have died and more than 30,000 have been infected this year in a major measles outbreak in Ukraine, the European country worst hit by the disease, Kiev said Monday.

The latest victim was a nine-year-old girl who died from complications Saturday after contracting the highly infectious disease, the health ministry said.

Some 30,500 people, including 17,000 children, have been infected so this year.

Authorities said shortages of vaccine in previous years and anti-vaccination sentiment, often driven by online campaigns spreading false information about the alleged risks, were the main reasons behind the outbreak.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a 95-percent vaccination rate to prevent mass hospitalisations and fatalities.

But in Ukraine, just 42 percent of one-year-olds had been vaccinated as of end-2016, according to the United Nations children's agency UNICEF.

Measles cases more than tripled across Europe in 2018, with Ukraine accounting for most of the gain.

Europe as a whole saw nearly 83,000 cases last year, according to WHO

figures.

The Ukrainian government reported 54,000 cases in 2018. There were 16 deaths nationwide.

In 2019, the authorities launched a special campaign including sending mobile vaccination teams to rural schools in two western regions particularly hard hit in the outbreak.

Measles is characterised by high fever and a reddish rash. It usually triggers only mild symptoms but remains one of the leading causes of death among young children globally.

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