

Samoa shuts schools, declares emergency as measles kills 6

November 18 2019, by Nick Perry



In this November 2019, image from video, a child gets vaccinated at a health clinic in Apia, Samoa. Samoa closed all its schools on Monday, Nov.18, 2019, banned children from public gatherings and mandated that everybody get vaccinated after declaring an emergency due to a measles outbreak. For the past three weeks, the Pacific island nation of 200,000 people has been in the grip of a measles epidemic that has been exacerbated by low immunization rates. (TVNZ via AP)

Samoa has closed all its schools, banned children from public gatherings and mandated that everybody get vaccinated after declaring an emergency due to a measles outbreak that has so far killed six people.

For the past three weeks, the Pacific island nation of 200,000 people has been in the grip of a measles epidemic that has been exacerbated by low immunization rates.

Schools were closed from Monday after the government declared an emergency on Saturday. The National University of Samoa also told students to stay home and said exams scheduled for this week had been indefinitely postponed.

Health authorities said most of those who died were under the age of 2. They counted 716 measles cases reported, with nearly 100 people still hospitalized including 15 in [intensive care](#).

Samoa's Director General of Health Leausa Take Naseri said in a news conference last week that he expects the epidemic will get worse. He said that only about two-thirds of Samoans had been vaccinated, leaving the others vulnerable to the virus.

But figures from the World Health Organization and UNICEF indicate that measles immunization rates among Samoan infants have fallen steeply from over 70% in 2013 to under 30% last year.

Helen Petousis-Harris, a vaccine expert at New Zealand's University of Auckland, said the Samoan government halted its immunization program for several months last year after two infants died from a medical mishap involving a vaccine.



In this November 2019, image from video, a child gets vaccinated at a health clinic in Apia, Samoa. Samoa closed all its schools on Monday, Nov.18, 2019, banned children from public gatherings and mandated that everybody get vaccinated after declaring an emergency due to a measles outbreak. For the past three weeks, the Pacific island nation of 200,000 people has been in the grip of a measles epidemic that has been exacerbated by low immunization rates. (TVNZ via AP)



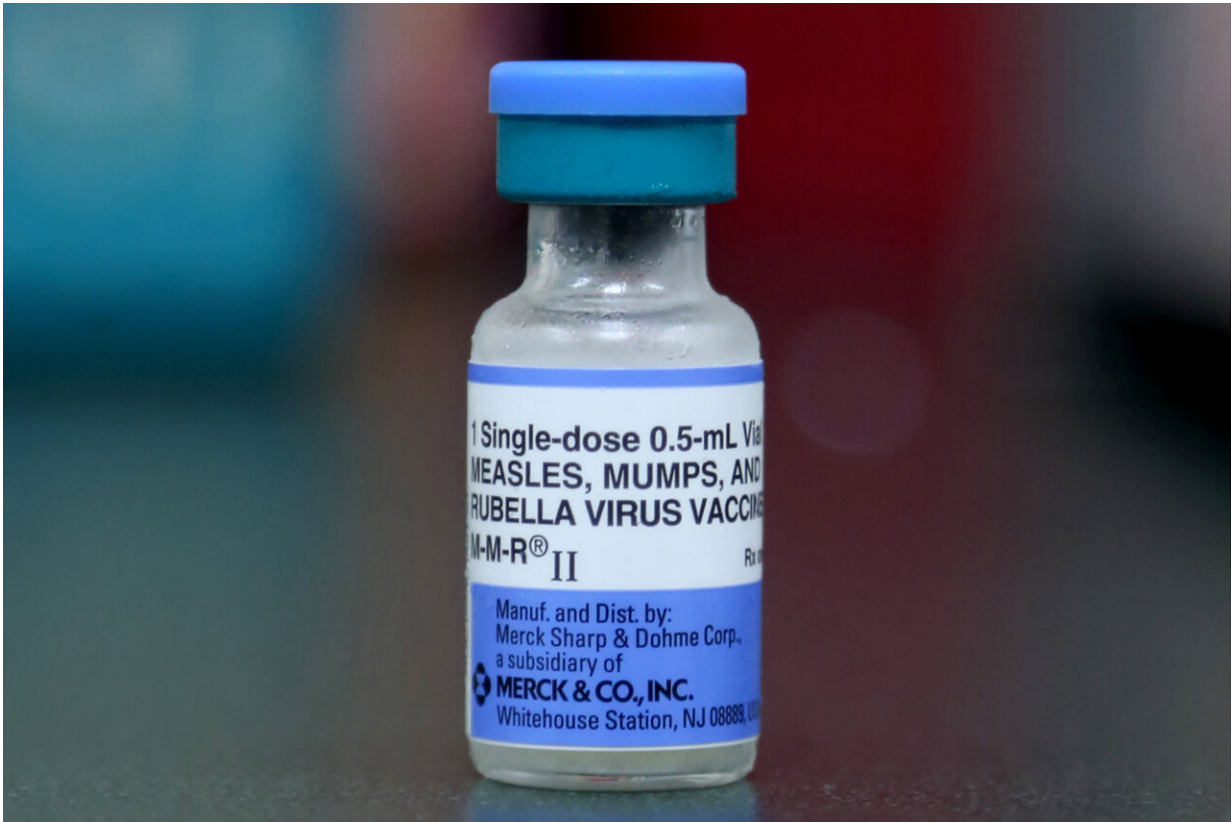
In this November 2019, image from video, children with parents wait in line to get vaccinated outside a health clinic in Apia, Samoa. Samoa closed all its schools on Monday, Nov. 18, 2019, banned children from public gatherings and mandated that everybody get vaccinated after declaring an emergency due to a measles outbreak. For the past three weeks, the Pacific island nation of 200,000 people has been in the grip of a measles epidemic that has been exacerbated by low immunization rates. (TVNZ via AP)



In this November 2019, image from video, masked children wait to get vaccinated at a health clinic in Apia, Samoa. Samoa closed all its schools on Monday, Nov.18, 2019, banned children from public gatherings and mandated that everybody get vaccinated after declaring an emergency due to a measles outbreak. For the past three weeks, the Pacific island nation of 200,000 people has been in the grip of a measles epidemic that has been exacerbated by low immunization rates. (TVNZ via AP)



In this November 2019, image from video, a woman prays in front of a portrait of her lost child with measles in Apia, Samoa. Samoa closed all its schools on Monday, Nov. 18, 2019, banned children from public gatherings and mandated that everybody get vaccinated after declaring an emergency due to a measles outbreak. For the past three weeks, the Pacific island nation of 200,000 people has been in the grip of a measles epidemic that has been exacerbated by low immunization rates. (TVNZ via AP)



In this May 17, 2019, photo, a measles vaccination is seen at the Knox County Health Department in Mount Vernon, Ohio. Samoa closed all its schools on Monday, Nov. 18, 2019, banned children from public gatherings and mandated that everybody get vaccinated after declaring an emergency due to a measles outbreak. For the past three weeks, the Pacific island nation of 200,000 people has been in the grip of a measles epidemic that has been exacerbated by low immunization rates. (AP Photo/Paul Vernon, File)

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said Monday it was sending 3,000 vaccines to Samoa as well as nurses and [medical supplies](#).

Ardern said Samoan authorities believe the outbreak was started by a traveler from New Zealand.

"We, of course, have an open flow of people," Ardern said. "But we see our responsibility as supporting Samoa as they deal with the outbreak, and we are doing that actively."

Petousis-Harris said it was disappointing that people in New Zealand who were carrying the virus had traveled to Samoa. She said New Zealand has for years known it has immunity gaps.

"But we didn't deal with the problem," she said.

Tonga, Fiji and New Zealand have also reported outbreaks of [measles](#) but on a smaller scale than in Samoa.

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