

No reprieve as Samoa measles death toll hits 70, UN sends aid

December 9 2019



An immunisation drive has boosted coverage rates from just 30 percent to around 90 percent

A devastating measles outbreak has continued to spread in Samoa, with the death toll reaching 70, as the United Nations on Monday released

\$2.6 million in emergency aid to combat the epidemic.

Official figures showed there were 112 new cases in the 24 hours to Monday morning, despite a massive immunisation drive last week that saw the entire Pacific nation shut down for two days.

In New York, the UN undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, Mark Lowcock, announced the aid had been released.

"The people of Samoa will not fight this outbreak alone," Lowcock said in a statement. "We can and must move swiftly to stop this deadly outbreak in its tracks."

The funds will go towards vaccinations, obstetric and neonatal care for infected mothers and newborns, clean water and public health information campaigns, the UN said.

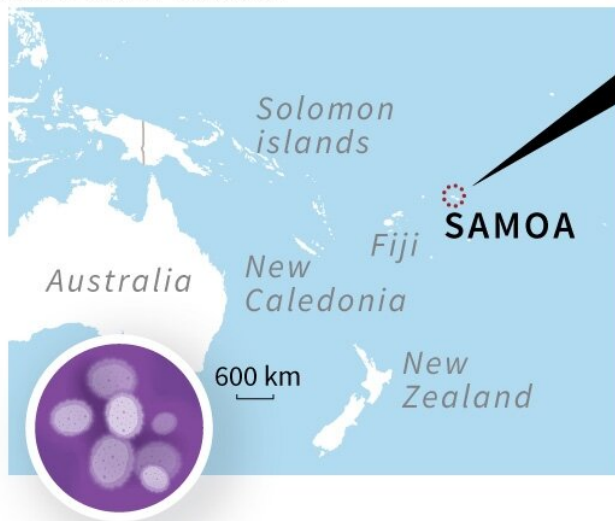
Samoa's government said the mobile vaccination teams had succeeded in ensuring 90 percent of the 200,000-strong population was immunised, up from around 30 percent when the epidemic began in mid-October.

However, the vaccine takes 10-14 days to take effect, meaning it is too early to say whether the outbreak has peaked.

The total number of cases was 4,693, with 229 people currently in hospital, including 16 critically ill children.

Samoa measles outbreak

Since mid-October



State of emergency since Nov 15

Population: 197,000

4,693 cases reported as of Dec 9

70 fatalities

including 61 under 4 years old

The WHO blames an anti-vaccine messaging campaign for the outbreak

Mobile vaccination teams have immunised 90 percent of the population since the outbreak

- Unvaccinated young children are at **highest risk** from measles and its complications

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Graphic on the Samoa measles outbreak.

Infants are the most vulnerable to measles, which typically causes a rash and fever but can also lead to brain damage and death.

Among the 70 dead, 61 are children aged four or under.

Health authorities have blamed "anti-vaxxers" spreading conspiracy theories for the low immunisation rate that left Samoa's children so vulnerable to a measles outbreak.

Outbreaks elsewhere in the Pacific, including Tonga, Fiji and American Samoa, have been easier to contain because of higher immunisation

rates, with no deaths reported.

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