

Measles cases soar in Europe: WHO

January 23 2024

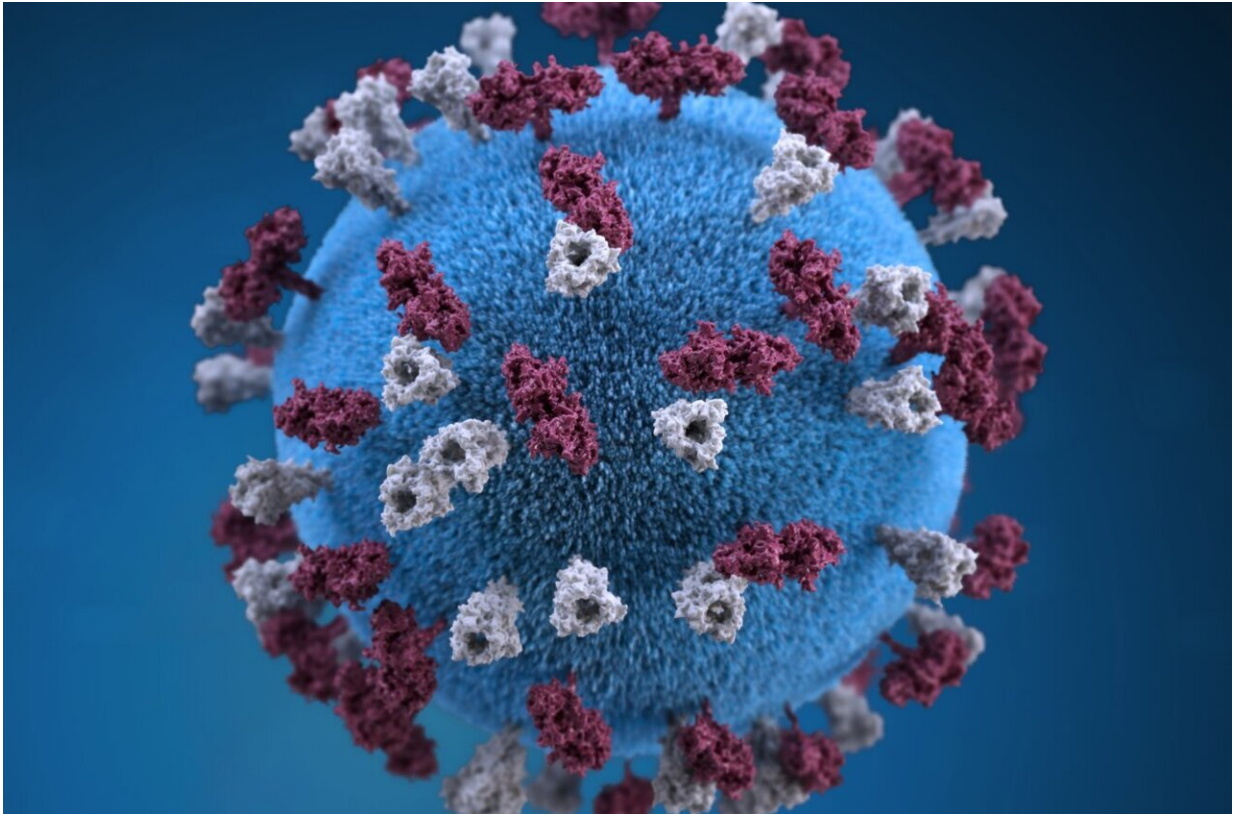


Illustration of the virus which causes measles. Credit: CDC/ Allison M. Maiuri, MPH, CHES

Measles cases soared in Europe in 2023 to 42,200, a nearly 45-fold increase over the previous year, the UN health agency said on Tuesday, calling for urgent vaccination efforts to halt the spread.

Some 41 countries out of 53 the World Health Organization includes in its Europe region reported the infectious disease, WHO said. In 2022, 941 cases were registered.

Vaccination rates against the disease slipped during the COVID-19 pandemic and "urgent vaccination efforts are needed to halt transmission and prevent further spread".

Russia and Kazakhstan fared the worst, with 10,000 cases each from January to October last year. In Western Europe, Britain had the most cases with 183.

The WHO also said there were nearly 21,000 hospitalizations and five measles-related deaths in the January-October period. "This is concerning," WHO said.

Some 1.8 million infants in the WHO's Europe region were not vaccinated against measles between 2020 and 2022.

"It is vital that all countries are prepared to rapidly detect and timely respond to measles outbreaks, which could endanger progress towards measles elimination."

Falling vaccinations

Measles is caused by a virus and spreads easily when people breathe, cough or sneeze. It is most common in children, but can affect anyone.

Symptoms often include a rash, running nose, cough and watery eyes. Complications can be severe.

Measles vaccinations consist of two shots, usually one at nine months of age and the second at 15-18 months. The vaccine is often given along

with one for mumps and rubella and known as MMR.

At least 95 percent of children need to be fully vaccinated against the disease in a locality to prevent outbreaks.

Vaccination rates against measles have been dropping across the globe.

In 2022, 83 percent of children received a first measles vaccine during their first year of life, up from 81-percent coverage in 2021, but down from 86 percent before the pandemic and the lowest level since 2008, WHO has said previously.

In 2022, only 92 percent of children in Europe received a second dose of the vaccine, according to WHO.

In Britain, in some areas around the major city of Birmingham the level of full vaccination has dropped to 81 percent.

In 2021, there were an estimated 128,000 measles deaths worldwide, mostly among under-vaccinated or unvaccinated children under five, it said.

WHO estimates that measles vaccines have helped prevent 56 million deaths between 2000 and 2021.

© 2024 AFP

Citation: Measles cases soar in Europe: WHO (2024, January 23) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-01-measles-cases-surge-europe.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.