

Measles outbreak kills 30 in Romania

23 June 2017

A measles outbreak affecting several European countries has killed 30 people in Romania, most of them children, health authorities in Bucharest said on Friday.

More than 7,200 people in the European Union's second-poorest country have contracted the illness since late 2016, Romania's contagious disease monitoring centre said.

There was also a 31st suspected fatality.

The respiratory disease, characterised by high fever and small red spots, usually triggers only mild symptoms, but it remains one of the leading causes of death among young children globally.

The World Health Organisation recommends two doses of vaccination, the first by a child's first birthday, to ensure immunity and prevent outbreaks, saying they should cover 95 percent of the population.

But in Romania, due not only to poverty but also a lack of vaccines and poor access to health care, the rate is only 80 percent for the first shot and 50 percent for the second.

The Romanian government is currently pushing through legislation that would make vaccination obligatory in order for children to be allowed to go to school.

Compounding the problem, a growing number of parents are refusing to have their children immunised with religious groups and public figures also launching anti-vaccination campaigns.

The WHO warned in March about a rising number of measles cases in Europe, with the largest outbreaks in Romania and Italy. France, Germany, Poland, Switzerland and Ukraine were also affected.

On Thursday a six-year-old boy with leukaemia died from measles in Italy. He had an 85-percent

chance of being cured of his leukaemia but his parents refused to have him vaccinated for measles, Italian authorities said.

They said that at least 3,074 measles cases have been recorded this year, 40 percent of whom had to be hospitalised. The WHO said on Tuesday that 43 percent of cases in Europe were in Italy.

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