

# *WHO says measles an imminent threat as children miss vaccination*

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**The two-dose vaccine against the measles virus is about 97 percent effective in preventing severe illness and death [File: Paul Vernon/AP Photo]**

Geneva, November 25 (RHC)-- Measles is at "imminent threat" of spreading in various parts of the world after the COVID-19 pandemic led to many children missing their routine vaccinations, the World Health

Organization (WHO) and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have warned.

Millions of children are now susceptible to measles, among the world's most contagious diseases, the public health agencies said in a joint report on Wednesday. The disease is almost entirely preventable through vaccination, but at least 95 percent vaccine coverage is necessary to prevent outbreaks.

A record high of nearly 40 million children missed a measles vaccine dose in 2021 due to difficulties created by the COVID pandemic, the report said. Continued drops in vaccination, weak disease surveillance and delayed response plans due to COVID-19, in addition to ongoing outbreaks in more than 20 countries, mean that "measles is an imminent threat in every region of the world", it warned.

Officials said there were about 9 million measles infections and 128,000 deaths worldwide in 2021. The WHO and CDC reported that only about 81 percent of children had received their first dose of the measles vaccine, while 71 percent got their second dose, marking the lowest global coverage rates of the first measles dose since 2008.

"The record number of children under-immunized and susceptible to measles shows the profound damage immunization systems have sustained during the COVID-19 pandemic," CDC director Dr Rochelle Walensky said in a statement.

Measles is mostly spread through direct contact or in the air and causes symptoms including fever, muscle pain and a skin rash on the face and upper neck. Most measles-related deaths are caused by complications including swelling of the brain and dehydration. The WHO says severe complications are most serious in children under five and adults over 30.

While measles cases have not yet gone up dramatically compared with previous years, now is the time to act, the WHO's measles lead, Patrick O'Connor, told the Reuters news agency.

More than 95 percent of measles deaths occur in developing countries, mostly in Africa and Asia. There is no specific treatment for the disease but the two-dose vaccine against the virus is about 97 percent effective in preventing severe illness and death.

In July, the United Nations said 25 million children had missed out on routine immunisations against diseases including diphtheria, largely because the coronavirus pandemic had disrupted routine health services or fuelled vaccine misinformation.

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