

Current Health Event

Measles Outbreak in Lebanon

Despite the availability of a safe, effective and free vaccine in the primary healthcare centers and dispensaries, Lebanon remains endemic to measles virus and outbreaks are expected periodically. Measles outbreaks pose a serious challenge to the global WHO elimination efforts. Data from Lebanon shows an increasing trend in measles cases with 39 cases reported in 2015, 44 in 2016, 126 in 2017 and 582 as of 31 May 2018.

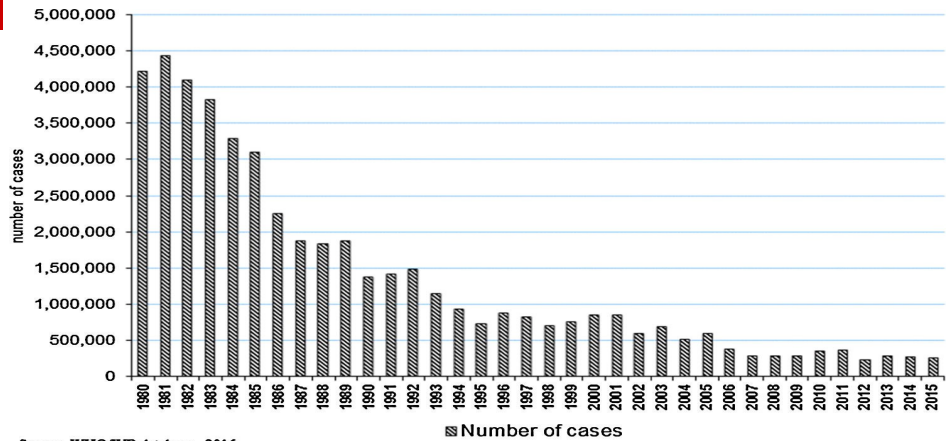
Editorial note:

Measles is a highly contagious, serious disease caused by a virus in the paramyxovirus family. Despite the availability of a safe and effective vaccine, measles remains one of the leading causes of death among young children causing around 89,780 measles deaths worldwide in 2016 alone, mostly among children below five years of age. Measles outbreaks are currently reported in Democratic Republic of Congo, England, France, Greece, Italy, Indonesia, Philippines, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine with seven documented measles deaths as of 31 April 2018.

In Lebanon, measles cases are currently observed in all provinces, most prominently in Baalbeck/Hermel and Bekaa with attack rates of 38/100000, and Mount Lebanon and Nabatieh (6/100000). Children younger than 10 years of age are the most affected by the current measles outbreak with an attack rate of 56.8/100000 and 20.5/100000 for those aged under 5 years and 5 to 9 years respectively. Cases are distributed among Lebanese (73%) and Syrians (27%); no cases were reported among Palestinians. While 40.3% of cases had unknown vaccination status, almost 67.4% of children with known vaccination status were not vaccinated.

The MoPH response was geared towards preventing further expansion of

Figure 1: Number of measles cases reported to WHO by year, 1980–2015



Source: WHO/IVB database, 2016
194 WHO Member States.
Data as of 15 July 2016

this outbreak and further measles outbreaks over the coming years, as per the measles elimination target. A rapid response was conducted on several levels. Advocacy material targeting healthcare workers and the community were developed and 30 training sessions were conducted for the epidemiological surveillance peripheral teams, health centers and hospitals. 23,764 measles containing vaccine doses were given to children between 6 months and 15 years of age through accelerated immunization activities in Shatila, Zahle, Jnah and Ouzai between March 15 and April 22nd, 2018. MoPH is working on expanding its efforts in accelerated immunization activities in vulnerable areas to strengthen routine immunization. Other preventive interventions were conducted in areas with no dispensaries and which were not covered by previous accelerated immunization activities.

The expanded program on immunization (EPI) technical committee convened in May 2018 in the presence of the director general of the MoPH, and the head of the EPI department to discuss the need for a national measles campaign. MoPH, with the support of WHO, UNICEF, and several international and local NGOs, is closely monitoring the measles situation in the country to tailor responses accordingly.

The Measles & Rubella Initiative

Launched in 2001, the Measles & Rubella Initiative is a global partnership that is committed to ensuring that no child dies from measles or is born with congenital rubella syndrome; reducing measles deaths by 95% by 2015; and achieving measles and rubella elimination in at least 5 WHO regions by 2020.

Notifiable Diseases in Lebanon [cumulative n° of cases among all Residents (among Syrians)] as of 2 June 2018

Disease	2017	2018	April 18	May 18
Vaccine Preventable Diseases				
Polio	0	0(0)	0 (0)	0(0)
AFP	77	39(13)	5(0)	9(4)
Measles	126	583(157)	167(40)	176(19)
Mumps	235	53(19)	5(2)	8(4)
Pertussis	92	20(8)	2(2)	5(0)
Rabies	1	1(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Rubella	10	6(1)	1(0)	0(0)
Tetanus	0	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Viral Hep. B	321	94(8)	14(0)	15(2)
Water/Food Borne Diseases				
Brucellosis	460	96(7)	20(2)	14(0)
Cholera	0	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Hydatid cyst	18	2(1)	1(1)	0(0)
Typhoid fever	656	109(3)	11(0)	12(0)
Viral Hep. A	776	306(54)	51(5)	22(1)
Other Diseases				
Leishmaniasis	140	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Meningitis	366	151(35)	24(6)	27(6)
Viral Hep. C	130	43(4)	7(0)	11(0)