

LETTER TO EDITOR

The Pandemic's Shadow: Measles Vaccination Challenges and Trends

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Measles is a highly contagious, serious disease caused by a virus. Before the introduction of measles vaccine in 1963, major epidemics occurred approximately every 2-3 years and caused an estimated 2.6 million deaths each year (1). Government of India launched Universal Immunization Program in 1985, which provides vaccination against 8 life threatening disease including measles and 65% vaccine coverage was achieved. In order to increase the vaccination coverage, Mission Indradhanush was launched in phased manner which aimed to fully immunize more than 90% of newborn by 2020. India has adopted the National strategic Plan for achieving and sustaining measles and Rubella elimination in India and has vaccinated over 324 million children between 2017 and 2020 through MR vaccination campaign (2). Due to the lag, India had shifted its self-imposed deadline to eliminate measles to 2023 and launched another vaccination campaign in 2021 called the Intensified Mission Indradhanush 3.0, targeting unvaccinated children.

Immunization being one of the most successful public health interventions, coverage has plateaued over the last decade. Measles was previously on the verge of eradication in many parts of the world. Recent reports suggest a

concerning trend with an increase in measles cases in India, attributed partly to disruptions in vaccination campaigns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, there were localized outbreaks and a noted rise in cases during 2022 and 2023(3). COVID 19 pandemic has caused disruption in the health system and changes in individual health seeking behavior globally causing decline in vaccine coverage of routine immunization among children. 25 million children were missed out in routine vaccination in 2021, which was 5.9 million more than in 2019 and the highest number since 2009 (4). Disruptions in immunizations services were widespread in 2020 with the WHO Southeast Asian and Eastern Mediterranean regions most affected. According to WHO and UNICEF, up to 17 million children likely did not receive a single vaccine during the year, widening already immense inequities in vaccine access. Most of these children live in communities affected by conflict, in under-served remote places, or in informal or slum settings where they face multiple deprivations including limited access to basic health services (5,6). In addition to the pandemic, other challenges like vaccine hesitancy, migrant workers and lack of tracking system is also an issue in some parts of the country. Increasing population and lack of

resources should also be addressed in eliminating measles.

To address this issue, it is crucial that we take several actions:

Restore and Strengthen Vaccination Programs: Governments and health organizations must prioritize the catch-up vaccination campaigns to address the backlog of missed doses. This includes outreach efforts to ensure that children who missed their vaccinations during the pandemic receive them as soon as possible.

Enhance Public Education: Combat vaccine hesitancy by providing accurate information about the safety and efficacy of vaccines. Public health campaigns should be intensified to counter misinformation and rebuild trust in vaccination programs.

Monitor and Evaluate: Ongoing surveillance of vaccination coverage and disease incidence is essential to promptly identify and address emerging outbreaks. Data-driven approaches will help in targeting resources and interventions where they are most needed.

Support Healthcare Systems: Strengthening healthcare infrastructure to ensure that routine services, including immunizations, are resilient to future disruptions is critical. Investments in healthcare systems will mitigate the impact of similar crises in the future.

The resurgence of measles is a stark reminder of the interconnected nature of public health challenges. As we navigate the ongoing

recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, let us not lose sight of the progress made in combating other infectious diseases. A renewed commitment to vaccination and public health is essential to safeguard our communities against preventable diseases.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors haven't used any generative AI/AI assisted technologies in the writing process.

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