

2017 Measles-Rubella Vaccination Campaign in India

Dear Editor,

The member states of the United Nations have agreed to eliminate measles and rubella, and bring about an end to the associated deaths in newborns and children by 2030, and thus aid in the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals.^[1] Both measles and rubella are major public health concerns and account for a significant socioeconomic burden on the families in particular and the community in general.^[2] In India, more than 2.5 million children acquire measles infection, while close to 49,000 infected children die each year, which in itself accounts for 37% of the disease-specific deaths worldwide.^[1] Further, rubella infection leads to the development of birth defects in almost 40,000 children annually in the nation.^[1]

Even though due to the constant efforts of the health workers, expansion of the immunization activities (like an increase in the coverage of the first dose of measles vaccine or the introduction of a second dose of vaccine in routine immunization schedule since 2010), and because of the strengthening of the surveillance activities, a 51% fall has been observed in the measles-specific mortality rates between 2000 and 2015, yet a lot needs to be done.^[1-3]

To ensure protection against the vaccine-preventable diseases and to improve the health standards of people, the Health Ministry has initiated a Measles-Rubella (MR) vaccination campaign in the nation, starting from three states and two union territories.^[1] This campaign has been implemented in collaboration with different stakeholders (international/national welfare agencies and nongovernmental organizations).^[1] The aim of the campaign is to reach more than 400 million children (aged 9 months to 15 years) in the next couple of years and administer a single shot of MR vaccine regardless of their earlier vaccine or disease status.^[1]

The plan is to provide the vaccine free of cost across the states in schools, health facilities, and in outreach sites.^[1] However, for the campaign to be effective, no child should be left behind, and hence it is extremely important that all the stakeholders (viz., parents, community leaders, teachers, and health workers) should actively participate in the campaign.^[1] Eventually, the plan is to introduce the MR vaccine in the national immunization schedule and replace the existing strategy of administering two doses of measles vaccine, at 9–12 months and 16–24 months of age.^[1]

To conclude, the decision of the Health Ministry to launch MR vaccination campaign in India is a major development to safeguard the health standards of

vulnerable children and simultaneously reduce the incidence of deaths.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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