



**American  
Red Cross**

# Measles Prevention

The American Red Cross is working to prevent measles around the world as a founding partner of the Measles & Rubella Initiative. The Initiative is a global partnership committed to ensuring that no child dies from measles or is born with congenital rubella syndrome. Founded originally as the Measles Initiative in 2001, the Initiative continues to be led by the American Red Cross, the United Nations Foundation, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, UNICEF and the World Health Organization. The Initiative has supported the vaccination of more than 1 billion children in over 80 countries helping reduce measles deaths by 71% globally (between 2000 and 2011) and aims to reduce measles mortality by 95% by 2015. Starting in 2012, thanks to the financial support of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, the rubella vaccine has been combined with the measles vaccine to protect children against two diseases with one shot.

## About Measles

Measles is a leading cause of death and disability among young children worldwide, even though a safe and cost-effective vaccine is available. In 2011, measles claimed an estimated 158,000 lives — 430 each day. It is a highly contagious disease and even healthy, well nourished children, if unvaccinated, are at risk of measles and its severe health complications, such as pneumonia, diarrhea and encephalitis.

In vulnerable populations such as undernourished children, the disease becomes deadly which is why 95% of measles deaths occur in low-income countries with weak health infrastructures. It costs less than US \$1 to vaccinate a child against measles, making it one of the most cost-effective health interventions available.

## Progress from 2000 to 2011

Measles deaths fell by 71% globally from an estimated 542,000 in 2000 to 158,000 in 2011. Sub-Saharan African countries made the most progress and reduced measles deaths by about 84%.



Progress against measles stalled from 2008-2010 when reduced political and financial commitment resulted in an increase in unprotected children and large outbreaks in many parts of Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. In 2010, India accounted for an estimated 47% of child deaths due to measles. India has since intensified efforts to offer an additional dose of measles vaccine to children living in the most at-risk areas.

Measles vaccination campaigns often include other life-saving interventions. In addition to the incorporation of the rubella vaccine as mentioned above, the Initiative and its partners have supported the distribution of more than 41 million insecticide-treated bed nets for malaria prevention, 113 million doses of deworming medicine, 137 million doses of polio vaccine, and 247 million doses of vitamin A.

## What's Next

Despite the significant drop in measles deaths since 2000, there is more work to be done as more than 430 children still die each day from this preventable disease. Several challenges must be overcome to achieve the global measles prevention goals: (1) necessary financial resources must be secured to ensure timely and high quality measles prevention activities through 2020 and beyond; and (2) political commitment in priority countries must be strengthened and sustained to ensure that the necessary number of children are vaccinated through routine immunization (i.e., via a country's normal healthcare system) and these special Initiative vaccination campaigns.

Photo: International Federation

For more information or to make a donation to help prevent measles, please visit [www.measlesrubellainitiative.org](http://www.measlesrubellainitiative.org).

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