





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 2017: Milestones and Progress in the Global Fight Against Measles and Rubella

The Measles & Rubella Initiative's (M&RI) efforts have helped save 21.1 million lives and reduced the estimated annual number of measles deaths worldwide to 80%<sup>i</sup> since 2000. However, further gains will require a concerted effort to improve vaccination coverage.

Sustaining the progress in the fight against measles is challenging—and the reason why the work of M&RI remains crucial to improving health and saving the lives of millions.

Since its founding as an international partnership in 2001, the Initiative's<sup>ii</sup> goals have remained the same, which are to:

- reach every child everywhere with safe, effective measles vaccines;
- work with country ministries of health to strengthen routine immunization systems;
- train and supply health workers;
- provide technical assistance to identify cases of disease and respond to outbreaks quickly; and
- provide necessary financial funding.

The Initiative's efforts to support routine vaccination and supplemental immunization campaign efforts resulted in the vaccination of 2.9 billion children<sup>iii</sup> in 88 countries from 2000 through 2016.

### Progress against rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS).

With more than 100,000 cases of CRS estimated each year, the M&RI pledged to vaccinate all children against rubella to provide immunity for all age groups, and protect women of childbearing age from the virus. The Initiative carved further inroads in its rubella vaccination efforts last year. Nine more countries adopted the combined measles-rubella vaccine into their routine immunization schedules, which brought the total number of countries offering the rubella-containing vaccine (RCV) to 162.

These efforts are yielding positive results. The number of reported rubella cases dropped to 22,361 in 2016 from a high of 670,894 in 2000. This number is expected to continue to decline as the Initiative works to introduce the combined measles-rubella vaccine in two of the most populated countries, Indonesia and India. These two countries have a combined estimated 450 million children scheduled to be vaccinated through mass vaccination campaigns in 2018 and 2019.

More countries added a second dose of measles-containing vaccine (MCV2) into routine immunization programs to protect greater numbers of people against the disease. The Initiative's

promotion of a second dose of measles vaccine, which provides a second chance for measles immunity, resulted in three more countries—Lao People's Democratic Republic, Namibia, and Nicaragua—introducing MCV2 to their national immunization schedules in 2017. Now, 167 countries provide a second dose of the vaccine. A child needs two measles injections to ensure full immunity and protection against the virus. Although the number of countries offering MCV2 increased, efforts now need to focus on boosting the 2016 global MCV2 coverage of 64 percent.

In 2017 alone, the Initiative supported the vaccination of more than 205 million children during 53 Supplemental Immunization Activities (SIAs) in 39 countries. These campaigns provided additional health interventions, such as Vitamin A, deworming medication, and other vaccines.

### We must protect and maintain our advances to reach our goals by responding to measles outbreaks.

While M&RI has made progress, we must guard against complacency and remain vigilant to anything that threatens the headway we have made. This includes controlling outbreaks. In 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared nine more countries measles-free, but this achievement can be lost quickly if an outbreak is not contained.

The M&RI's expertise and reach is critical to building the capacity and providing the resources needed to detect and respond to measles cases quickly. Last year the Initiative confirmed outbreaks in countries around the world where vaccination coverage has slipped and populations are no longer protected through herd immunity. Sadly, children in the poorest countries suffer the most and experience higher mortality rates because they are often malnourished and do not have access to adequate health care.

Measles outbreaks around the world and the resurgence of cases in areas that WHO had certified as measles free send a clear message that we must keep up the fight against measles.

The Initiative's current and vigorous efforts to stop outbreaks in the Region of the Americas shines a light on the vital need for strong national immunization systems there. The M&RI's outbreak response activities in the Region include providing vaccines, materials, and technical assistance to stop measles transmission associated with Venezuela measles outbreak. In addition, WHO's Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is taking steps to reduce the risk of the disease spreading further into neighboring countries by deploying staff to support surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory services, immunization systems, and risk communication.

The Americas are not isolated in experiencing outbreaks. WHO's European Region reported 9,385 measles cases in the first half of 2017—nearly double the number of new cases reported in the previous year. The increase in measles cases stretched across Europe, with confirmed outbreaks in Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Romania, Spain, Tajikistan, and Ukraine.

The Initiative remains committed to protecting children around the world against these two vaccine-preventable diseases. Each of the five founding partners continues to provide their resources and unique expertise to reach this shared goal.

**The United Nations Foundation (UNF)** supported the Initiative's Outbreak Response Fund (ORF) with a \$10 million grant it receives every year from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. During 2017, the M&RI used \$8.4 million from its ORF to vaccinate more than 9 million children, fighting large measles outbreaks in six countries—Bangladesh, Guinea, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, South Sudan, and Tajikistan.

UNF further supports the Initiative by forecasting future resource requirements and working to engage new donors.

In 2017, **the American Red Cross** directly supported vaccination campaigns that resulted in more than 5.4 million children being vaccinated in five countries—Benin, Burundi, Indonesia, Malawi, and Senegal. Also, the American Red Cross' work drove the demand for increased vaccinations through use of social mobilization at the community level to reach, encourage, and educate caregivers about the importance of vaccines.

**The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** provided countries with technical assistance, as well as surveillance support, both of which are necessary to identify and respond to potential outbreaks. Through the CDC-supported Global Measles and Rubella Laboratory Network, over 150,000 measles samples and more than 125,000 rubella samples were tested. Genotyping by the Network showed that of the nine measles genotypes circulating in 2008, only five now circulate—evidence of the real progress being made in the fight against measles.

**UNICEF** not only provides technical assistance to plan and conduct SIAs, but also continues to manage the distribution of vaccines for the campaigns throughout the year. In 2017, UNICEF procured and delivered 347 million doses of measles vaccine to 80 countries.

**WHO** continued its strong support of the M&RI by updating its guidance on measles, rubella, and CRS surveillance, and supporting the Global Measles and Rubella Laboratory Network. WHO provides technical assistance and accreditation of laboratories that meet established quality standards.

WHO also evaluated measles and rubella elimination strategies through the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE), which made recommendations that refined strategies and updated guidance on the population immunity needed to reach and sustain elimination. Furthermore, WHO supports the oversight of the direct distribution of funds to countries from the Initiative's ORF that are used for outbreak response activities.

**M&RI continues its steadfast commitment to end measles and rubella.**

The Initiative's successful actions spring from a strong core partnership that remains committed to protecting children from the vaccine preventable diseases of measles and rubella. With the continued support of the M&RI, countries around the world will keep making progress, building strong national immunization systems that can reach every child with the lifesaving vaccines.

The achievements are real, measurable, and commendable, but fragile. Still, much work remains to be done to stop tragic and unnecessary deaths each year from the vaccine-preventable disease of measles. The Measles & Rubella Initiative's efforts will not end until all children everywhere are protected from measles and rubella.

For more information, see the Measles and Rubella Initiative at:

[www.MeaslesRubellaInitiative.org](http://www.MeaslesRubellaInitiative.org)

i Global measles deaths annually in 2000: 550,000.

ii The Measles & Rubella Initiative's five founding members include: American Red Cross, the United Nations Foundation, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization, which was founded in 2001.

iii M&RI supported the vaccination of 2.9 billion children with 5.5 billion measles vaccine doses.



MEASLES  
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INITIATIVE



American  
Red Cross



CDC  
CENTERS FOR DISEASE  
CONTROL AND PREVENTION



unicef



UNITED NATIONS  
FOUNDATION



World Health  
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