

# Media brief

European Region reports  
highest number of measles  
cases in more than 25 years

MARCH 2025



# Overview

## In 2024, Europe and Central Asia saw the highest number of reported measles cases in more than 25 years.

Some 127,352 cases of measles were reported in 53 countries across Europe and Central Asia throughout 2024. Children under five accounted for 43 per cent - more than 54,000 - of reported cases. More than half of all people - nearly 74,000 - who contracted measles in 2024 required hospitalization.

Hospitalizations from measles are mostly due to complications such as pneumonia, diarrhoea, and dehydration, which can be life-threatening, particularly for young children. Other debilitating and deadly complications include encephalitis, kidney failure, and hepatitis.

Measles cases in the European Region have generally been declining since 1997 - when some 216,000 cases were reported - reaching a low of 4,440 cases in 2016. A resurgence was seen in 2018 and 2019, however, with 89,000 and 106,000 cases reported respectively. Following a backsliding in immunization coverage during the pandemic, cases have risen significantly again in 2023 and 2024. Vaccination rates in many countries are yet to return to pre-pandemic levels, increasing the risk of outbreaks.

Meanwhile immunization coverage in most of the countries in the Region fell below the recommended level for herd immunity, which is a vaccination rate of 95 per cent or higher.

In 2023, 500,000 children across the 53 countries in Europe and Central Asia missed the first dose of the measles vaccine - MCV1. Less than 80 per cent of eligible

children in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Romania were vaccinated with MCV1 in 2023 - far below the 95 per cent coverage rate required to retain herd immunity. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro the coverage rate for MCV1 has remained below 70 per cent and 50 per cent respectively for the past five or more years. For example, in 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina reported a coverage rate of 55 per cent and Montenegro reported a coverage rate of 24 per cent for MCV1 - critically low levels of immunization coverage.

Measles is one of the most contagious viruses circulating in communities. For every one person who has measles, 12 to 18 other people will be infected. This makes measles around 12 times more contagious than influenza, six times as contagious as Ebola, and twice as contagious as COVID-19 and chickenpox.

As well as hospitalization and death, measles can cause long-term, debilitating health complications. It can also damage the immune system by "erasing" its memory of how to fight infections, leaving measles survivors vulnerable to other diseases and death.

It can affect anyone but is most common in children.

Vaccination is the best line of defence against the virus. If someone who has not been vaccinated is exposed to measles, they have a 90 per cent chance of contracting the virus. If someone is exposed to measles who has been vaccinated, they have at least a 97 per cent chance of not contracting it.

**Cover image:** © UNICEF/UN0635915/Babajanyan VII Photo  
Six-year old Muso smiles as he looks down at his arm, held by his father, after his MMR vaccination at a health centre in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. March 2022.



# Measles – the facts

Measles infects the respiratory tract and then spreads throughout the body. Symptoms include a high fever, cough, runny nose and a rash all over the body. Most deaths from measles are from complications related to the disease.

Complications can include blindness, encephalitis - an infection causing brain swelling and potentially brain damage, severe diarrhoea and dehydration, ear infections and severe respiratory problems including pneumonia.

One very rare, but lethal complication that can arise in measles-infected people is a specific type of encephalitis called subacute sclerosing panencephalitis (SSPE), which affects one in 100,000 cases. This viral infection lies dormant in the body for six to eight years before neurological symptoms start. These include loss of motor skills - like the ability to walk, loss of hearing, loss of vision, and brain damage. The disease often progresses to a coma and death. There is no cure.

Measles is incredibly dangerous for pregnant women and can result in pre-term birth and low birth weight.

Complications are most common in children under five. They are particularly likely in children who are malnourished, especially those without enough

vitamin A or those who have a weak immune system. However, having adequate nutrition, vitamin A or no pre-existing conditions is not a guarantee against developing measles complications. Anyone who is not vaccinated is at risk.

## Treatment

There is no specific treatment for measles. Caregiving should focus on relieving symptoms, making the person comfortable and preventing complications. Drinking enough water and treatments for dehydration can replace fluids lost to diarrhoea or vomiting. Doctors may use antibiotics to treat pneumonia and ear and eye infections.

## Prevention

Community-wide vaccination is the most effective way to prevent measles. All children must be vaccinated with two doses of the measles vaccine. **The vaccine is safe, effective and inexpensive.**

**Above:** © UNICEF/UN0760563/Babajanyan VII Photo

On 10 November 2022 in Kyrgyzstan, Cholpon, 62, holds her granddaughter, 18-month-old Emilia, as she is examined by paediatrician Aidana Askarova during a medical checkup in Bishkek.

# Epidemiological update

## Reported measles cases in the European Region over the past 30 years



## Measles cases in 2024

This data provides an overview of measles cases across the Region in 2024. Most cases involved individuals who were unvaccinated or had an unknown vaccination status. There have been 38 recorded deaths so far and this number may grow due to delayed reporting.

Number of total measles cases

127,352



Number of hospitalized cases	74,428
Percent hospitalization	58%
Number of measles laboratory confirmed cases	85,386
Percent laboratory confirmed	67%
Number of deceased	38
Percent unvaccinated/unknown vaccination status	87%
Number of measles epidemiologically-linked cases	20,134
Percent epidemiologically linked	16%
Percent <1 year of age	14%
Percent <5 years of age	43%
Number measles clinically compatible cases	21,677
Percent clinically compatible	17%

Source: Measles/Rubella Dashboard Microsoft Power BI as of update on 8 March 2025

## Incidence rates

Country	Incidence rate (per 1 million population)	Total measles cases	Country	Incidence rate (per 1 million population)	Total measles cases
Albania	17.55	49	Lithuania	9.44	27
Andorra	0	0	Luxembourg	4.46	3
Armenia	187.64	558	Malta	18.53	10
Austria	60.85	555	Monaco	51.77	2
Azerbaijan	1,614.65	16,690	Montenegro	54.82	35
Belarus	58.52	530	Netherlands (Kingdom of the)	11.19	204
Belgium	45.23	531	North Macedonia	1.1	2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	530.93	1,680	Norway	1.97	11
Bulgaria	4	27	Poland	7.37	284
Croatia	8.52	33	Portugal	3.36	35
Cyprus	19.88	27	Republic of Moldova	71.5	217
Czechia	3.45	37	Romania	1,614.09	30,692
Denmark	4.18	25	Russian Federation	152.44	22,076
Estonia	2.94	4	San Marino	59.56	2
Finland	0.36	2	Serbia	132.42	892
France	7.06	470	Slovakia	0.91	5
Georgia	91.66	349	Slovenia	8.02	17
Germany	7.65	647	Spain	4.59	220
Greece	3.48	35	Sweden	3.49	37
Hungary	1.86	18	Switzerland	11.99	107
Iceland	5.08	2	Tajikistan	0	0
Ireland	40.34	212	Turkiye	17.41	1,523
Israel	2.77	26	Turkmenistan	0	0
Italy	17.81	1,057	Ukraine	12.49	473
Kazakhstan	1,366.85	28,147	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	41.95	2,900
Kyrgyzstan	2,005.01	14,408	Uzbekistan	40.12	1,459
Latvia	0	0			

**Total cases 127,352**

Romania reported the highest number of measles cases in the European Region in 2024 with 30,682 infections. Followed by Kazakhstan with 28,147 cases and the Russian Federation with 22,706 cases.

Region	Percentage	Global cases
European Region	35%	There were 359,521 cases reported globally in 2024. With 127,352 cases reported in Europe and Central Asia, the region represents 35 per cent of global cases.
Eastern Mediterranean Region	27%	
African Region	24%	
South-East Asia Region	10%	
Western Pacific Region	3%	

# Vaccine coverage across the European Region

This chart illustrates MCV1 (measles-containing vaccine, first dose) coverage across the WHO European Region from 2000 to 2023 (the latest available data - based on WHO/UNICEF estimates published in 2024.) In 2023, 24 out of 53 countries in the Region reported vaccine coverage of less than 95 per cent - the level required to prevent outbreaks. Countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, have experienced sharp declines, with Montenegro dropping to just 24 per cent in 2023.

	MCV1 coverage, by country, EUR, 2000-2023																							
	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Hungary	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99
Belarus	98	99	99	99	99	99	97	99	99	99	99	99	98	99	99	99	98	97	98	98	97	98	98	97
Uzbekistan	99	99	97	99	98	99	98	98	98	95	98	99	99	97	99	99	99	99	96	98	99	99	99	99
Kazakhstan	99	95	95	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	96	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	93	97	99	99
Turkmenistan	96	98	88	97	97	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	98	97	98	99
Russian Federation	97	97	98	98	98	99	99	99	99	98	98	98	98	98	98	98	98	98	98	98	97	97	97	97
Slovakia	98	99	99	99	99	98	98	99	99	99	98	98	99	98	97	95	95	96	96	96	96	95	95	94
Kyrgyzstan	98	99	98	99	99	99	97	99	99	99	99	97	98	99	96	99	97	95	96	96	92	93	94	96
Andorra	97	97	98	96	98	94	91	94	98	98	99	99	98	95	96	96	97	99	99	99	98	99	98	99
Luxembourg	93	94	94	95	95	95	95	96	96	96	96	96	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99
Israel	95	95	95	96	97	94	96	97	98	97	96	97	96	98	97	98	97	98	98	99	99	99	98	98
Czechia	97	97	98	97	97	97	97	98	97	98	98	98	98	99	99	99	98	97	96	92	94	97	97	87
Spain	94	96	97	98	97	97	97	97	98	98	95	97	97	95	96	96	97	98	98	98	96	95	96	96
Greece	89	91	92	94	95	96	98	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97
Germany	92	94	94	95	96	96	96	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97	97
Portugal	87	90	93	96	95	93	97	95	97	95	96	97	97	98	98	98	98	98	99	99	99	98	98	98
Latvia	97	98	98	98	98	98	98	95	96	92	95	92	90	96	95	96	93	96	98	99	99	97	96	96
Finland	96	96	96	97	97	97	97	98	97	98	98	97	97	97	96	95	94	94	96	96	95	93	94	94
Sweden	91	94	95	95	96	96	97	96	96	97	97	97	98	97	97	98	97	97	97	97	97	97	92	93
Poland	97	97	98	97	97	98	99	98	98	98	98	98	98	98	97	96	96	94	93	93	92	91	91	91
Albania	95	95	96	93	96	97	95	97	98	97	99	99	98	99	98	97	96	96	94	95	91	87	86	83
Armenia	92	93	91	94	92	94	92	92	94	96	97	97	97	97	97	97	96	95	95	94	94	95	96	96
Netherlands (Kingdom of the)	96	95	95	96	96	95	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	95	94	93	93	94	94	93	89	89
Slovenia	95	94	93	94	94	94	96	96	96	95	95	96	95	94	94	94	92	93	93	94	94	95	96	95
Lithuania	97	97	98	98	98	97	97	97	97	96	96	94	93	93	93	94	94	94	92	93	90	88	87	87
Turkiye	87	91	83	75	81	91	98	96	97	97	97	98	96	98	94	97	98	96	96	97	95	96	95	95
Croatia	93	94	95	94	96	96	95	96	96	95	96	96	95	94	94	93	90	89	93	93	91	89	90	90
Bulgaria	89	90	92	96	95	96	96	96	96	96	97	95	94	95	93	92	92	94	93	95	88	89	91	92
Tajikistan	88	88	89	91	92	85	82	85	86	89	94	98	97	97	98	97	97	98	98	98	98	97	98	98
Estonia	93	95	95	95	96	96	96	96	95	95	95	94	94	94	93	93	93	93	87	88	91	89	89	89
Norway	88	90	87	86	89	90	92	92	93	93	93	93	94	93	94	95	96	96	96	97	97	97	96	96
Denmark	99	94	95	96	96	95	90	89	87	84	85	87	90	89	90	91	94	97	95	96	94	95	95	95
Belgium	82	82	82	82	82	88	92	92	93	95	95	95	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96
Iceland	91	88	91	93	93	90	95	95	96	92	93	94	90	91	90	93	91	92	93	93	93	92	91	91
Monaco	98	98	97	97	96	96	94	95	94	92	93	91	91	91	90	89	89	88	88	88	88	88	88	88
Romania	98	98	98	97	97	97	95	97	96	96	95	93	94	92	89	86	86	86	90	90	87	86	83	78
Republic of Moldova	89	94	94	96	96	97	96	96	95	90	97	91	91	91	90	89	88	93	93	97	84	83	84	85
Switzerland	82	82	82	82	82	87	87	87	92	92	92	93	93	93	94	94	94	95	95	95	97	95	96	95
Georgia	73	74	75	76	86	90	96	97	97	83	94	91	93	97	92	96	93	95	98	99	91	90	90	95
France	84	85	86	87	88	87	89	90	89	89	89	89	91	90	91	91	90	90	90	92	94	94	95	95
San Marino	99	97	96	94	94	94	90	90	86	88	88	90	84	82	81	84	82	86	89	86	90	89	91	89
United Kingdom	88	85	85	82	81	82	85	86	86	86	89	90	92	93	93	93	92	92	92	91	91	91	90	90
Italy	74	77	81	84	86	87	88	90	90	90	91	90	90	90	87	85	87	92	93	94	92	94	94	95
North Macedonia	97	92	98	96	96	96	94	96	98	96	98	97	96	96	93	89	82	83	75	75	63	70	71	73
Serbia	89	90	92	87	89	96	88	95	82	95	95	93	87	92	86	86	82	86	92	87	78	75	81	84
Ireland	79	73	73	78	81	84	86	87	89	90	90	92	92	93	93	93	92	92	92	91	92	90	90	89
Malta	74	70	65	90	94	86	94	79	78	82	73	84	93	99	98	89	93	91	96	96	95	90	96	95
Cyprus	86	86	86	86	86	86	87	87	87	87	87	87	86	86	86	90	90	90	90	86	86	86	84	82
Austria	75	79	78	79	74	75	80	79	83	76	80	84	88	92	96	96	95	96	94	95	95	99	95	95
Azerbaijan	67	68	66	67	67	67	69	75	79	85	89	92	94	98	98	98	98	98	96	98	82	93	93	96
Ukraine	99	99	99	99	99	96	98	97	94	75	56	67	79	79	56	56	42	86	91	93	85	88	74	92
Bosnia and Herzegovina	80	92	89	84	88	90	85	96	84	93	91	89	94	92	89	83	68	69	68	65	61	61	58	55
Montenegro	—	—	—	—	—	—	90	90	89	86	90	91	90	88	76	64	47	58	42	33	24	18	33	24

Source: WHO/UNICEF Estimates of National Immunization Coverage, 2023 revision

Note: Countries ordered based on descending crude average MCV1 coverage across all years.

Vaccine coverage (%) 0%  100%

## Estimated MCV1 coverage, and number of vaccinated and unvaccinated children, EUR, 2000-2023



Source: WHO/UNICEF Estimates of National Immunization Coverage, 2023 revision

In 53 countries across Europe and Central Asia, the number of children vaccinated with MCV1 decreased 10 per cent from 10.1 million in 2019 to 9.2 million in 2023. In 2023, 1 million fewer children were vaccinated than in 2019 and 500,000 eligible children missed their first dose of MCV1.

Measles, because of its high transmissibility, quickly exposes immunity gaps in the population. Measles vaccination estimates, therefore, serve as a trace indicator for overall community protection from vaccine preventable disease.

### Challenges in immunization coverage

Measles cases *had* been reducing since 1997, when some 216,000 cases was reported. The last few years, however, have seen an increase in outbreaks. This is largely attributed to a backsliding in immunization coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic. The region is yet to fully recover to pre-pandemic childhood vaccination rates. During these years, health services, including routine vaccination, were severely disrupted. At the same time lockdowns and overwhelmed primary health care systems contributed to a decrease in vaccine demand. The pandemic exacerbated uncertainty and mistrust

in health institutions contributing to the spread of misinformation and growth of hesitancy around vaccines.

At the same time, decreased international funding and critical gaps in technical capacities to strengthen health systems and increase vaccination coverage exist.

**Below:** © UNICEF/UNI430489/Hudak

Olha and her one-year-old son Maksym visit their paediatrician in Uzhhorod, Ukraine, 2023. "We came for vaccinations according to the calendar," says Olha. "We always get routine vaccinations and all possible additional ones. Right now, we're getting the measles shot and, before that, we had the flu and rotavirus vaccination."



# Policy recommendations

UNICEF and WHO work together with governments, and partners including GAVI to address measles outbreaks. This includes listening to community concerns and creating targeted vaccination programmes and campaigns, particularly for marginalized populations including Roma communities. Investment in and training of health workers is a critical part of increasing vaccination rates, alongside work to strengthen vaccine supply chains.

As part of this work, UNICEF and WHO are calling for countries to:

- Urgently identify and reach all children who have missed vaccinations.
- Strengthen demand for vaccines including by building confidence in health systems, health workers and vaccines.
- Prioritise funding for accessible immunization services and primary health care, particularly for marginalised communities.
- Build resilient health systems through investment in health workers, innovation and local manufacturing.

UNICEF and WHO are calling for governments with active outbreaks to intensify case finding, contact tracing and conduct emergency vaccination campaigns. It is imperative that countries analyse the root causes of outbreaks, address weaknesses in their health systems, and strategically utilise epidemiological data to identify and close coverage gaps. Reaching marginalized communities and tackling inequitable access to vaccines must be central to all efforts.

Countries that do not have current measles outbreaks should be prepared, including through addressing gaps in coverage, building and sustaining public trust in vaccines and maintaining strong health systems.



Above: © UNICEF/UN0302001/Filippov

Bohdan plays with his son David, 1, in the vaccination room of a state polyclinic in the centre of Kyiv, Ukraine, as David is about to get his first vaccination with MMR vaccine.

## Additional information

For more information on measles outbreaks, prevention, and response efforts in Europe and Central Asia, please refer to the following resources:

WHO Europe:  
[measles overview and latest data](#)

UNICEF Europe and Central Asia:  
[Measles information for the public](#)

**UNICEF Europe and Central Asia**  
**Regional Office**  
September 2024

4 Route des Morillons  
Geneva 1202  
Switzerland

Telephone: +41 22 909 5509

[ecaro@unicef.org](mailto:ecaro@unicef.org)

[www.unicef.org/eca](http://www.unicef.org/eca)

**unicef**   

---

**for every child**