



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Cambodia Launches National Measles-Rubella Vaccination Campaign to Protect Over 1.5 million Children

PHNOM PENH, 31 October 2024. Today, the Ministry of Health of the Kingdom of Cambodia launched a nationwide measles-rubella (MR) vaccination campaign to protect over 1.5 million children aged 9 to 59 months (under 5 years old) across 25 provinces. This campaign, led by the Ministry of Health, receives financial support from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI).

In response to a global surge in MR cases, particularly among populations with low vaccination rates, this campaign addresses the urgent need for protection against these highly contagious diseases. Globally, measles cases have more than doubled in recent years, with reported cases rising from 170 000 in 2022 to over 320 000 in 2023, which is largely due to disruptions in routine immunization during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cambodia, along with its neighboring countries, faces a heightened risk of outbreaks, especially in vulnerable populations such as children, migrants, mobile populations, and communities in border areas. This national MR vaccination campaign is a critical measure to strengthen health security, protect against potential outbreaks, and support Cambodia's goal of becoming measles-free.

H.E. Prof. CHHEANG Ra, Minister of Health encourages all health staff and partners to work together to ensure full coverage of the target population and protect all children in the country from the two diseases. His Excellency stated, "Health personnel have done a good job during previous immunization campaigns, and I am sure that during this campaign too, health staff will do everything they can to reach all children, especially those living in high-risk and hard to reach areas, such as children living in urban poor households; those living in remote rural communities, children of ethnic minorities, and migrant children."

According to the WHO/UNICEF Estimates of National Immunization Coverage (WUENIC), Cambodia's 2023 national coverage for the first and second doses of the MR vaccine was 79% and 64%, respectively – figures that remain below the levels needed to prevent outbreaks and avert deaths.

Dr. Marianna Trias, WHO Representative to Cambodia, said, "Measles and rubella are serious but entirely preventable threats that Cambodia's children should never have to face. This nationwide campaign is a vital step towards health equity, ensuring that no one is left behind in our mission to promote, protect, and provide health for all. Together with the Ministry of Health and partners, WHO is committed to closing immunity gaps to strengthen health security and protect everyone in our communities from outbreaks and make Cambodia measles-free for every family."



Ms. Nadia Lasri, Senior Country Manager and Coordinator of Gavi support in Cambodia, said: “Gavi’s support for this nationwide measles-rubella vaccination campaign builds on our ongoing efforts to strengthen Cambodia’s routine immunization programme. Measles and rubella remain significant threats to children’s health globally. We must double down on our efforts to reach every child, especially those unvaccinated in hard-to-reach areas and urban areas, and ensure no community is left behind, which is a crucial step towards a healthier future for the children in Cambodia.”

Dr. Will Parks, UNICEF Representative to Cambodia, said, “Immunization has always been at the forefront of our efforts to protect the most marginalized children. Through this experience, we’ve learned that effective communication with communities and local authorities is key to making sure that parents and caregivers bring children to the nearest vaccination post. By supporting this vaccination campaign, we hope that we will contribute further to the strengthening of the health system in Cambodia to promote sustainable provision of quality vaccination services to all children.”

Ms. Soleine Scotney, Country Director, CHAI Cambodia, mentioned, “Measles Rubella is one of the world’s most powerful vaccines. We strongly commend Cambodia’s dual efforts to both organize a powerful MR campaign but also further strengthen the routine MR vaccination touchpoints at 9 and 18 months, which together will allow each Cambodian child to receive this powerful gift.”

This campaign uses the WHO-prequalified combined MR vaccine and auto-disable syringes, which are procured through UNICEF. This MR vaccine, which has protected children worldwide for over 50 years, is safe, effective, and available free of charge at all health centers under the Ministry of Health. All children aged 9 to 59 months, including those who have previously received a measles or MR vaccine, are encouraged to receive a dose to boost community immunity, as part of Cambodia’s efforts to strengthen health security, prevent outbreaks, and work toward a measles-free future.

The campaign that will also focus on vaccinating children who have previously received one or more measles or MR vaccine doses will be divided into two phases: The first phase will cover 13 provinces (Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Kampong Cham, Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom, Kandal, Kratie, Oddar Meanchey, Phnom Penh, Pursat, Siem Reap, Pailin, and Tbong Khmum). The second phase will cover 12 provinces (Kampong Chhnang, Kampot, Koh Kong, Mondulkiri, Preah Vihear, Prey Veng, Rattanakiri, Preah Sihanouk, Stung Treng, Svay Rieng, Takeo, and Kep). The campaign will run from 25 November to 6 December.

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For further information, please contact:

National Immunization Program, Ministry of Health

Mr. Ork Vichit

Telephone: +855 (0)12830548



World Health
Organization
Cambodia



unicef 
for every child

Email: orkvichit@yahoo.com

WHO

Lisa Smyth

Technical Officer, Coordination and Communication for Health

Telephone: +855 12 919 180

Email: smythl@who.int

UNICEF

Hadrien Bonnaud

Chief of Communication

Telephone: +855 92 555 294

Email: hbonnaud@unicef.org

Ty Chan

Communication officer

+855 92 284 262

Email: tchan@unicef.org

CHAI

Corina Milic

Director of Global Communications

+1 416 371 6313

cmilic@clintonhealthaccess.org

GAVI

Meg Sharafudeen

+41 79 711 55 54

msharafudeen@gavi.org

Eunice Kilonzo-Muraya

+41 76 424 85 03

ekilonzo@gavi.org