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Key facts on immunization

A measles outbreak continues to affect thousands of people in Romania. Vaccines are safe and save millions of children's lives by preventing deadly diseases.

Current measles outbreak in Romania

- The ongoing measles outbreak in Romania began in February 2016.
- Over 15,000 people have contracted the disease. According to the National Institute of Public Health in Romania, 59 people have died, the majority (55) being children.
- Thirty-three of the children who have died were under 12-months-old. Seventeen children were between 1 and 3 years old and five children were between 4 and 17 years old.
- Measles killed four adults in Romania between 27 and 39 years old.

How to protect people in Romania

- Vaccination coverage rates in Romania must improve.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a vaccination coverage rate of at least 95 percent. Romania's current coverage rate is 81 percent, too low to provide adequate protection.
- Two doses of the MMR vaccine are needed to protect people from the current outbreak and prevent future outbreaks.
- National communication campaigns must be strengthened to educate parents on the benefits of vaccines. Parents need adequate information on where their children can be vaccinated, especially in communities without general practitioners and specialized vaccine centers.
- The Ministry of Health has launched a public health information website <http://desprevaccin.ro>, which provides a wide range of information on vaccines.

Vaccines are safe

- The MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) vaccine has been in use for almost 45 years. More than 500 million doses have been given in more than 100 countries worldwide.
- Between 2000 and 2015, the measles vaccination prevented an estimated 20.3 million deaths, making the vaccine one of the most effective and proven investments in public health globally.
- Vaccine-preventable diseases are serious and can lead to severe health complications and death.

More information here: <http://www.unicef.ro/media/vaccinul-impotriva-rujeolei-un-inceput-sigur-in-viata/>.

Vaccines prevent deadly diseases

- Deadly diseases can be safely and easily prevented with vaccines. If people are not vaccinated, diseases that have become uncommon, such as polio and measles, reappear.
- Globally, before the measles vaccine was introduced, more than 90 per cent of people were infected with the disease by the time they reached the age of 10 years.
- Children who survive measles often suffer from serious, and sometimes lifelong, consequences.
- High standards of hygiene and sanitation do not prevent the spread of deadly diseases. Immunizations are the only proven method to adequately protect.

Vaccines are cost-effective

- All vaccines included in Romania's national immunization programme are free. Anyone can get vaccinated for free by visiting their family doctor.
- Preventing the spread of diseases through immunization is far more cost-effective than treating people once they are sick.

UNICEF in Romania's actions on immunization

UNICEF has been working with the Ministry of Health (MoH), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the National Institute of Public Health to respond to the current outbreak and strengthen the routine vaccination system. In partnership with national authorities, this work includes raising awareness that vaccines are safe, cost-effective and save millions of lives and creating a national electronic vaccine registry to improve immunization planning and visibility.

UNICEF's actions to end the current measles outbreak

- UNICEF and WHO are supporting the MoH's ongoing immunization catch-up campaign targeting the most vulnerable districts with the lowest coverage rates in the country.
- This work included a door-to-door communication and vaccination campaign in three communities in Bacau County. A team of doctors and nurses worked with local general practitioners to immunize 95% of the children in these communities.

UNICEF's actions to increase immunization coverage

- UNICEF is working with the National Institute of Public Health to strengthen Romania's immunization programme. This includes providing support to modernize the National Electronic Vaccine Registry (RENV) and improving data collection on vaccination coverage rates to help immunization planning.
- UNICEF is providing support to strengthen vaccine management – including the process of handling and transporting vaccines starting from the point of entry to the delivery of vaccines to recipients.
- UNICEF invests in campaigns to promote good health to prevent the spread of diseases and encourage healthy practices and behaviors in families and communities.
- Based on the successful model of integrated services for children in Bacau county, UNICEF is developing curricula and providing training to integrated community health teams. These teams include nurses, health mediators, family doctors and social workers who do home visits, vaccinate, and communicate with children and families on health-related issues.

More information on UNICEF's work in Romania can be found here: <http://www.unicef.ro/>.