

Measles and Rubella Vaccination Campaign

The Government of India has launched the Measles and Rubella Vaccination Campaign in 2017 with a view to providing measles-rubella (MR) vaccines to children between the ages of nine months and under 15 years. This is an important topic for the health segment of the [UPSC syllabus](#).

Measles-Rubella (MR) Vaccination Campaign

The campaign was launched by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. It is an ambitious phased vaccination campaign that intends to cover more than 40 crore children.

- The campaign is aimed at protecting the children from the two highly contagious viral diseases measles and rubella.
- Measles kills almost 49000 Indian children annually. And, rubella (Congenital Rubella Syndrome or CRS) causes blindness and irreversible birth defects.
- While there are no treatment options available for both these diseases, they can be prevented by vaccinations.
- India is targeting the elimination of measles and rubella from the country.
- Measles immunisation will lead to a decrease in the rate of under-five mortality in India.
- Under the campaign, the vaccine will be provided free of cost to children.
- This is a massive public health movement and is being undertaken through coordinated efforts of the central and state governments, local governments, civil society and the healthcare workforce.
- Additionally, India also strengthens surveillance for measles and rubella, which is an important learning from the country's polio eradication programme that helped to identify infected and vulnerable areas and populations and enabled the programme to adopt appropriate strategies to eradicate the disease.

Background

India, along with ten other southeast Asian member countries of the [World Health Organisation \(WHO\)](#), had resolved to eradicate measles and control CRS by the year 2020.

- India has gained significant milestones in the health sector by eradicating several diseases such as polio, smallpox, maternal & neonatal tetanus, etc.
- Even with respect to measles, from about 100000 deaths in 2000 to 49000 deaths in 2015, the death rate has shown a good decline of around 51%.
- Even so, one-third of all the measles-related deaths worldwide happen in India. In the number of cases of measles, India is at rank 4 out of 194 countries.

Read more about [India's immunization drive](#) in the linked article.

What is Measles?

Measles is a viral disease that is highly contagious.

- It is spread through droplets of nose, throat or mouth of an infected person.
- The measles vaccine was introduced in 1963 and before that, more than 2 million deaths occurred every year attributable to this disease.
- Currently, despite the availability of a safe and effective vaccine, lakhs of children die every year globally affected by measles.
- Most of the deaths are under the age of five.

- The measles virus belongs to the paramyxovirus family and it is normally passed through direct contact and through the air.
- Due to aggressive immunization drives across the globe, measles deaths have declined by about 73% from 2000 to 2018.
- Symptoms of measles generally appear only 10 - 12 days after the infection. The common symptoms are:
 - High fever
 - Runny nose
 - Bloodshot eyes
 - Tiny white spots on the inside of the mouth
 - Rashes on the face, upper neck that spread downwards (this appears after several days)

Measles Vaccine

- This is called the MMR Vaccine giving protection against three diseases measles, mumps and rubella.
- The first dose of MMR is given at the age of 12 - 15 months, and the second one at 4 - 6 years.
- Adults and teenagers can also take MMR vaccinations as required.

What is Rubella?

Rubella is a normally mild viral infection that affects young adults as well as children.

- It is contagious and there is no known treatment for it, although it can be prevented by vaccination.
- It is very dangerous for the unborn child if a pregnant woman is infected by rubella.
 - It can cause blindness or irreversible birth defects (congenital rubella syndrome).
- Its distinctive symptom is a red rash and is also known as German measles or three-day measles.
- The rubella virus is different from the one that causes measles.
- Although both share a few symptoms, rubella is not as severe or contagious as measles.

Know the [differences between measles and rubella](#) in the linked article.

Rubella Vaccine

- MMR vaccine gives protection against rubella.

MR Vaccine Campaign Backlash

When the government introduced this massive vaccination drive, there were inhibitions from some quarters regarding the policy of giving vaccines at schools. The idea behind this was that schools offer the chance of covering a large number of children, otherwise difficult to achieve through hospitals, etc.

Parents and even a few schools were hesitant in giving consent for the immunization citing safety concerns. However, the government insisted that the vaccine being administered was safe and proven effective, and pre-qualified by the WHO.

Also read: [Anti-immunization Propaganda](#)

