

Measles, Rubella & CRS Rubella Watch

Rubella Watch is an electronic publication disseminated bimonthly by the Immunization Project of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization (WHO). Rubella Watch is a supplement to the Immunization Newsletter published by PAHO. The purpose is to provide you with the most up-to-date information on the measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) elimination initiative currently underway in the Americas.

The goal: maintain measles, rubella and CRS elimination in the Americas!



News from November-December 2009

Resounding Success of the Follow-up Campaign in Argentina

Argentina obtained 98% coverage in the measles-rubella (MR) follow-up campaign targeting children less than 5 years in all provinces during the final trimester of 2009. Over the course of 12 intense weeks, a total of 2,748,107 children were vaccinated. These children also received the polio vaccine (reaching 99% coverage).

The campaign used an indiscriminate vaccination strategy targeting all children aged 1-4 years with the measles-rubella vaccine, independent of their vaccination status. Additional efforts are being conducted in the city of Buenos Aires to achieve homogenous coverage throughout the country.

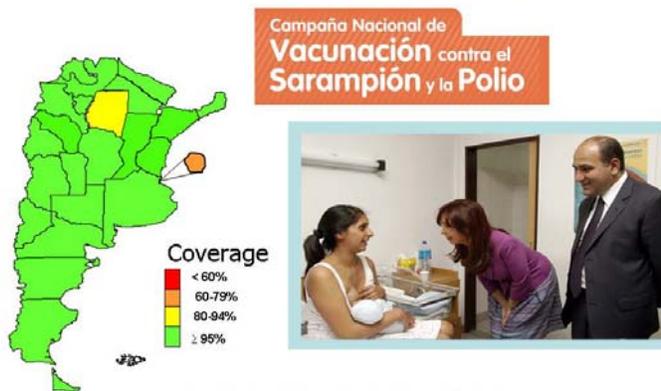
These efforts reflect the strong commitment of the country's authorities and the work ethic of its health workers to protect the achievements of measles, rubella, and polio elimination. The campaign follows the recommendation of the Technical Advisory Group on Vaccine-preventable Diseases (TAG) to continue the implementation of high-quality, nationwide follow-up campaigns to ensure the vaccination of the entire cohort as a second opportunity to administer the first dose to those children that were missed by the routine program and to those who did not develop an immune response following vaccination with the first dose.

During 2009, Argentina reported three measles cases associated with importations: twins aged less than 1 year and an English tourist. In light of the circulation of wild-type measles, rubella, and polio viruses in other regions of the world, the countries of the Americas will implement combination strategies to administer the MR vaccine and polio vaccine in follow-up campaigns as a way to prevent the accumulation of susceptibles to these diseases and maintain elimination

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Measles-Rubella Vaccination Coverage. Argentina, 2009.



President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, accompanied by the Minister of Health, Juan Manzur, called upon mothers and fathers to vaccinate their children against measles, rubella, and polio. Photo: Ministry of Health-Argentina

Has endemic rubella virus transmission been interrupted in Argentina and Brazil?

Results from the active case search for suspect rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) cases conducted in Argentina indicate that the last case of rubella corresponds to epidemiological week 7, signifying that 10 months have passed since a rubella case has been confirmed. In 2009, Argentina has reported 3 CRS cases; the date of birth of the last CRS case was 6 July 2009.

Argentine health authorities continue monitoring virus excretion from the three CRS cases identified in 2009 and with the processing of

laboratory samples from patients suspected of dengue but whose results were negative in order to diagnose rubella, given that the dengue outbreak in the country at the beginning of this year could have masked some rubella cases. In addition, active searches in epidemiologically silent municipalities will continue. The results of these intensive surveillance actions will be presented in April 2010 before a committee of national and international experts.

Brazil also started to investigate confirmed CRS cases and congenital rubella infection (CRI) cases reported in the last three years (2007-2009).¹ According to the available data from this period, 30 CRI cases and 55 CRS cases were reported; the date of birth of the last reported CRS case is 12 September 2009. A multidisciplinary working group has been established to lead the additional investigation of these cases that will also include suspected CRS and CRI cases with inconclusive final classification. Results from the investigation will be presented in April 2010.

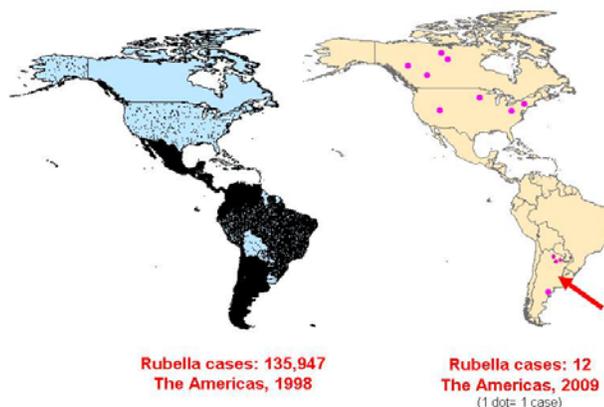
Rubella elimination in the Americas is defined as the interruption of endemic rubella virus transmission in all the countries of the Americas for a period greater than or equal to 12 months without the occurrence of CRS cases associated with endemic transmission.

During the last meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on Vaccine-preventable Diseases (TAG) in 2009, it was recommended that the countries that have reported the last rubella and CRS cases should implement activities, such as active case searches and monitoring of virus excretion of identified CRS cases, in order to document and verify the interruption of endemic virus transmission.

Essential Criteria for the Documentation and Verification of Measles, Rubella, and CRS Elimination

The approval of Resolution CSP27.R2 during the 27th Pan American Sanitary Conference in October 2007 ensured the establishment of national commissions in each Member State of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and the initiation of the documentation and verification process of the interruption of endemic measles and rubella virus in the Region of the Americas. In addition, the Resolution urges the formation of an International Expert Committee that will oversee the verification process.

Impact of Rubella Elimination Strategies. The Americas, 1998-2009*



Forty-three weeks have passed without endemic rubella cases in the Region of the Americas. The last case corresponds to epidemiological week 7 in Argentina.

Source: Country report to PAHO/WHO.

¹ Until epidemiological week 49/2009.

To this end, PAHO/WHO developed a regional plan to guide countries in the compilation and analysis of the required information. Members of the Technical Advisory Group on Vaccine-preventable Diseases (TAG) endorsed the Regional Plan of Action in August 2009 in Costa Rica. The plan of action provides an opportunity to place immunization programs as a high-ranking priority on the political agenda of countries and strengthen vaccination activities and surveillance systems.

The Plan of Action proposes the following essential criteria for the documentation and verification process:

- Verify the interruption of endemic measles, rubella, and CRS cases in all countries of the Americas for a period of at least 3 years from the last known endemic case, in the presence of high-quality surveillance: *zero cases of endemic transmission*.
- Implement and maintain a high-quality surveillance system sensitive enough to detect imported and import-related cases: ≥ 2 *suspected cases /100,000 population adequately investigated*.
- Verify the absence of endemic measles and rubella virus strains through viral surveillance in the Region of the Americas: *measles and rubella genotypes assessed in 80% of outbreaks*.
- Demonstrate that 95% of population cohorts aged 1-40 years have received a measles-rubella containing vaccine.

Rapid Coverage Monitoring Continues in Paraguay to Certify Goal Completion

Using random sampling by municipality, health workers continue to implement rapid coverage monitoring (RCM) in municipalities that did not achieve the 95% coverage goal during the measles-rubella follow-up campaign targeting the population aged less than 8 years in Paraguay. Currently 1,004 RCMs have been conducted and a total of 20,080 child guardians in the target age group have been interviewed.

According to available data, the percentage of vaccinated children registered by RCM has varied between 92-99% per municipality. In those conglomerates where the percentage is less than 95%, a second round of monitoring will be conducted in order to guarantee the absence of pockets of susceptibles. The working teams are making commendable efforts to reach the furthest outlying communities of the country.

At the end of the campaign RCM was also used to confirm that children aged 1-4 years had received two doses of the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine. Through the use of RCM, the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) of Paraguay also tries to evaluate the national coverage of the first routine MMR dose and implement effective strategies to strengthen vaccination services in those municipalities with low coverage.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year



The Comprehensive Family Immunization Project of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) would like to thank all the readers of *Rubella Watch* for your continuous efforts to support the rubella and CRS elimination initiative and for maintaining measles elimination. We wish you all a **Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year in 2010.**

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