

Measles and rubella elimination in the WHO European Region - Strengthening countries' capacities to fulfil requirements of the verification process

Intercountry meeting, 21–24 November 2017,
Copenhagen, Denmark

SCOPE AND PURPOSE

The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe (Regional Office) initiated the verification process of measles and rubella elimination in 2011, in line with the 2010 Regional Committee resolution on “Renewed commitment to elimination of measles and rubella and prevention of congenital rubella syndrome by 2015 and sustained support for polio-free status in the WHO European Region” (EUR/RC60/R12). The Regional Office’s Vaccine-preventable Diseases and Immunization programme (VPI) provides secretariat support to the European Regional Verification Commission for Measles and Rubella Elimination (RVC), to support and coordinate elimination- and verification- related activities of national technical counterparts and the national verification committees (NVCs) and to develop and implement relevant technical procedures and documents.

At its meeting in June 2017, the RVC concluded that progress in interrupting endemic transmission of measles and rubella across the Region is evident, and that further activities to promote the elimination goal, technical support and trainings to counterparts in countries and meetings of the RVC and NVCs members would help countries achieve and sustain disease elimination and would accelerate the verification process. The RVC also highlighted the importance of maintaining efforts to improve and strengthen the timeliness and quality of data reported by NVCs, with special emphasis on the need for further modification of the annual status update form.

In line with these recommendations to further strengthen national verification activities, VPI is organizing two intercountry meetings with Member States. The first of these meetings will take place on 21–22 November 2017, with representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and Ukraine. The second meeting will take place on 23–24 November 2017 with representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The chosen grouping of countries is intended to facilitate better involvement of all participants, optimize the size of working groups, and leverage similarities related to elimination activities, standard procedures in working with the

Regional Office and regional reference laboratories, and the official language for communication with the Regional Office.

Objectives of the meeting are to:

- inform country representatives about the current status of measles and rubella elimination in the Region, presenting results from the sixth RVC meeting with emphasis on conclusions and recommendations for countries present at the meeting;
- review and discuss activities and new developments in the verification process, underlining the roles and responsibilities of the NVCs and importance of cooperation of all measles and rubella elimination stakeholders in the national health system;
- review the revised measles and rubella annual status update form and provide participants with practical instructions on how to complete the form;
- discuss best practices and lessons learned from countries related to the process of verifying measles and rubella elimination;
- conduct technical consultations between VPI and national counterparts;
- address key measles and rubella laboratory challenges.

The back-to-back meetings have the same agenda, and will provide the opportunity for the RVC and RVC Secretariat to also meet and work with each three-member delegation individually. Countries are encouraged to nominate the chair or deputy chair of the NVC, the leading national expert for measles and rubella elimination and verification activities (e.g. immunization programme manager or equivalent) and head or deputy of the national reference laboratory for measles and rubella as representatives to the meeting.

Representatives of global specialized and regional reference laboratories in Germany, Luxembourg, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom will participate in the meetings and facilitate training sessions on the laboratory contribution to the verification process and the annual NVC report.

Representatives from partner organizations (including United Nations Children's Fund, United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control) and observers will also be invited to attend the meetings.

Expected outcome

The meeting will increase national capacities by providing participants with a better understanding of verification requirements, roles of the NVC and national technical counterparts and the procedure of reporting on elimination status. It is expected that this capacity-building opportunity will lead to improved quality of annual status updates provided by NVCs.

A meeting report will be prepared and shared with countries in 2018.