



World Health
Organization

Western Pacific



Hong Kong SAR (China) eliminates rubella

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21 May 2021, MANILA, Philippines – Hong Kong SAR (China) has achieved rubella-free status according to the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Verification Commission for Measles and Rubella Elimination for the Western Pacific. It joins Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Macao SAR (China), New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea as countries and areas in the Region to have interrupted endemic transmission of the virus that causes rubella.

Rubella is a viral infection that occurs most often in children and young adults. When a woman is infected with rubella during pregnancy, it can cause fetal death or birth defects. It is the leading vaccine-preventable cause of birth defects worldwide. There is no specific treatment for rubella, but the disease is preventable by vaccination.

“Rubella elimination exemplifies Hong Kong’s continuous efforts in prevention and control of communicable diseases. It also highlights the importance of vaccination in preventing disease as well as protecting oneself and the community—over 99% of pre-school children in Hong Kong have received rubella vaccine over the past decade. I wish to commend the dedication of Hong Kong’s health professionals over the years and the support of parents in ensuring that their children are vaccinated,” said Prof Sophia Chan, Secretary for Food and Health, Government of Hong Kong SAR (China).

“The success of Hong Kong SAR (China) with rubella elimination underscores the importance of strong systems for routine immunization and surveillance for infectious diseases,” said Dr Takeshi Kasai, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific. “I wish to congratulate the government, health workers and all the people who have been a part of this success. Thanks to their efforts, all children born in Hong Kong SAR (China) will have lifelong protection against the disease.”

Rubella elimination continues to progress. Over the past decade, cases of rubella have dropped dramatically in the Region, as millions of babies and young children have been reached with measles- and rubella-containing vaccines. But challenges remain, with several countries in the Region still experiencing outbreaks of rubella among adults.

At the 2017 session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific, countries committed to eliminate rubella as soon as possible. The Regional Committee urged Member States to develop or update action plans, dedicate adequate technical and financial resources for their implementation, and ensure that rubella immunization services reach everyone so that no one is left behind.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has disrupted essential immunization services, leaving millions of children unprotected from diseases such as measles, rubella and polio. While the world focuses on overcoming the pandemic by rolling out new vaccines and maintaining other preventive measures, the verification of rubella elimination in Hong Kong SAR (China) is a testament to the vital role played by immunization services and the importance of sustaining the progress that has been made to eliminate rubella.

“The success is encouraging, but there is no room for complacency. We will remain vigilant and would continue to work on closing immunity gaps in the population,” said Dr Constance Chan, Director of Health, Government of Hong Kong SAR (China).

Notes to editors:

The Ninth Annual Meeting of the Regional Verification Commission for Measles and Rubella Elimination in the Western Pacific was held virtually from 17 to 21 May 2021. The Commission reviewed reports from 16 countries and areas and the Pacific subregion, which is considered as one epidemiological block for surveillance and verification purposes. The Commission verified that Hong Kong SAR (China) had met all elimination criteria, including the interruption of transmission since 2016, for a period greater than 36 months.

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