



Sri Lanka



World Health  
Organization

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR

South-East Asia

# Reducing Rubella

The story of how this island nation safeguarded its people from rubella and congenital rubella syndrome



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**Reducing Rubella:** The story of how this island nation safeguarded its people from rubella and congenital rubella syndrome

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Sri Lanka, one of the oldest democracies in South-East Asia, was memorably called by Winston Churchill “the pearl of the Indian Ocean” – an epithet as valid today as it was in the 1940s. The country has a proud history of leadership in the Region, especially in the health sector, and in the recent past eliminated malaria (September 2015), lymphatic filariasis (June 2016), and maternal and neonatal tetanus. Today, it has controlled the dreaded disease of rubella and associated CRS and stands poised on the verge of measles elimination.

# FOREWORD

Sri Lanka has demonstrated that when the leaders of a country commit to health, the people reap rich dividends.

The country has made significant advances in controlling rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS), two years ahead of the 2020 target set at the Sixty-sixth session of the Regional Committee in 2013.

This is, indeed, a dramatic achievement.

The rubella vaccine is not new to Sri Lanka – the country was an early adopter, introducing the rubella vaccine into the Expanded Programme on Immunization in 1996. Though there was a steady decline in rubella incidence in the subsequent decade, 2011 saw a spike in the number of reported cases. But Sri Lanka's dynamic health system responded with rapid effect, changing vaccine protocol, sharpening reporting and surveillance and ensuring high immunization coverage through routine immunization and supplementary immunization activities.

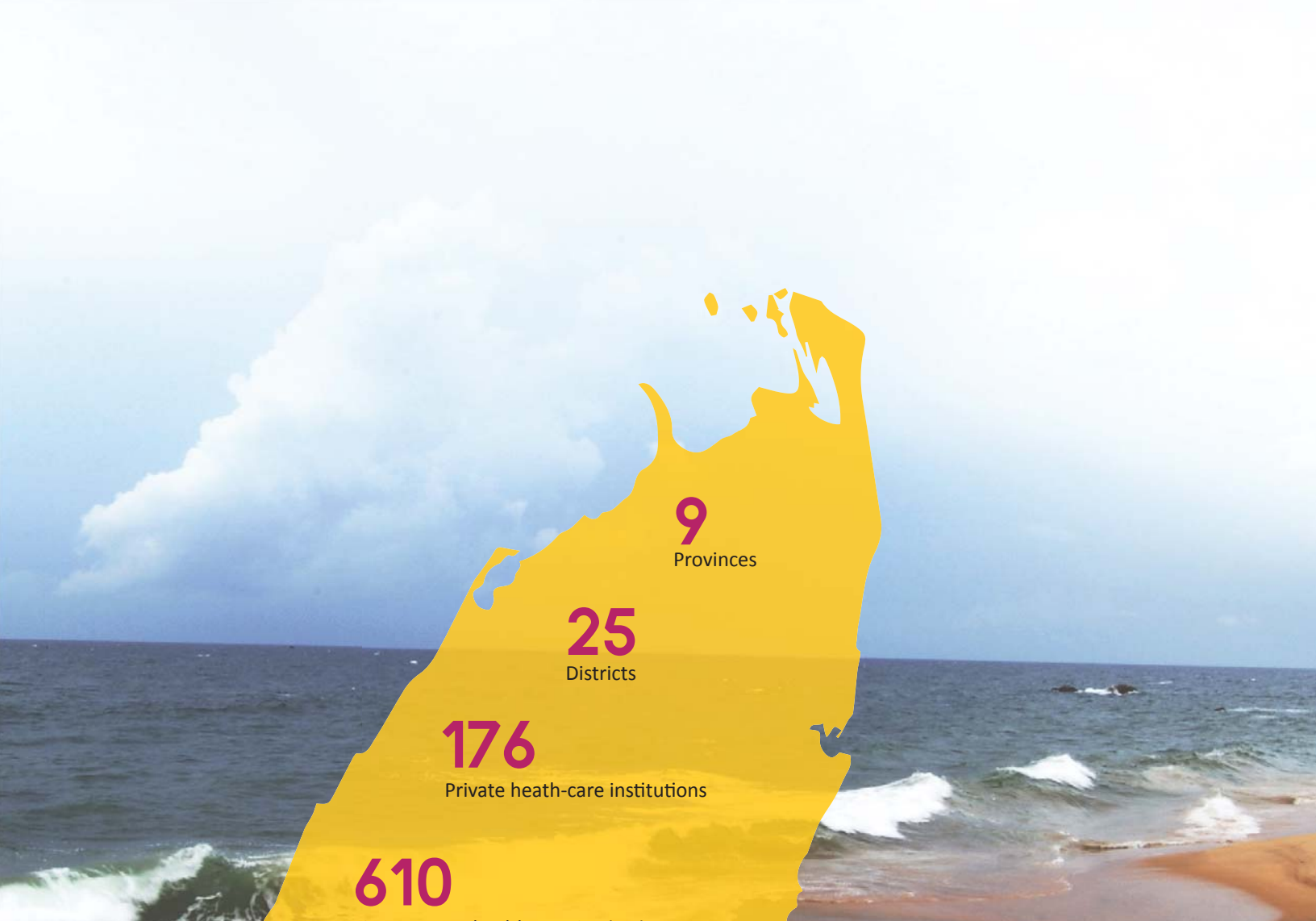
As a result, the number of rubella cases dropped to zero by 2017.

Through strong and committed leadership, sound budgeting, steadfast cooperation between Sri Lanka's health authorities and development partners, alongside the committed efforts of countless health workers and officials at the ground level, Sri Lanka has once again responded effectively to a public health problem.

I am confident that the country will continue on its path and greatly look forward to continuing to work with Sri Lanka to eliminate measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases in coming years. It is with great pleasure that I extend my congratulations to the leadership, health workers and people of Sri Lanka on their success in controlling rubella.



**Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh**  
Regional Director  
WHO South-East Asia Region



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