

Field guidelines for surveillance of measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome



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Contents

Foreword	5
Preface	7
Acknowledgements	8
1. Introduction	9
2. The diseases	9
2.1 Measles	9
2.2 Rubella	11
2.3 Congenital rubella syndrome	12
3. Measles, rubella and CRS surveillance objectives	12
3.1 Measles surveillance objectives	13
3.2 Rubella/CRS surveillance objectives	13
4. Establishing and strengthening an integrated measles/rubella/CRS surveillance system	13
4.1 General principles	13
4.2 Case definitions	14
4.3 Reporting sites	18
5. Surveillance activities and procedures for measles, rubella and CRS	18
5.1 Health facilities	18
5.2 Districts	20
5.3 Provinces	21
5.4 National level	21
6. Investigating and managing measles, rubella and CRS cases	22
6.1 Measles case investigation	23
6.2 Measles case management	24
7. Outbreak investigations and control for measles and rubella	25
7.1 Measles outbreak investigation	25
7.2 Rubella/CRS outbreak investigation	31
8. Laboratory support in measles and rubella surveillance	32
8.1 Measles/rubella serology	32
8.2 Viral detection/isolation/genotyping	33
8.3 Measles/rubella laboratory network	34
8.4 Alternative sampling techniques	34
9. Surveillance monitoring and feedback	35
9.1 Surveillance performance indicators for countries with elimination goal	35
9.2 Measures of progress towards measles elimination	36
9.3 Feedback	37
References	39
Annexes	41

Foreword

Great progress has been made toward measles elimination in the Eastern Mediterranean Region since 1997 when the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean passed a resolution (EM/RC44/R.6) to eliminate measles by 2010. This progress has been achieved thanks to the successful implementation of measles elimination strategies in the Region, particularly the high attainment of measles vaccine coverage and the implementation of a laboratory-supported measles case-based surveillance system in most countries.

Countries within the Region are at different stages of elimination. Some countries are still experiencing a high burden of disease and measles surveillance remains suboptimal. Other countries appear close to elimination, however surveillance systems are not up to the standards of elimination. Therefore, as most performance indicator targets are still not being met, measles elimination cannot be validated. There is an urgent need for a well-performing measles surveillance system to assess the burden of the disease and to measure the progress towards measles elimination in the Region.

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, in collaboration with other partners, particularly the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Atlanta, has developed these guidelines to help establish high-quality measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) surveillance systems. These guidelines provide practitioners in the field with the tools to identify, report and investigate cases of measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome. They also provide information on laboratory testing, identifying measles and rubella suspected cases, analysing data and monitoring the performance of the surveillance system.

It is hoped that, through the use of these guidelines, better information on measles and rubella can be obtained, which, in turn, will improve the performance of prevention programmes and reduce the incidence of morbidity and mortality due to measles and rubella.



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Preface

One of the strategies to reduce measles mortality is to enhance the surveillance of measles and rubella and integrate epidemiological and laboratory information. Since 2006, 19 countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region have conducted case-based surveillance and a regional laboratory network has been established in all 22 countries, including two regional reference laboratories—one in Oman and the other in Tunisia. However, in most countries, the surveillance system for measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) is not up to the same standard as the surveillance system for measles.

In 2006, the regional measles technical advisory group recommended that the Regional Office develop guidelines for the surveillance of measles, rubella and CRS. An extensive review of the literature was conducted to ensure that the guidelines were supported by all available evidence on the methods used to design and implement these surveillance systems. The review included measles surveillance guidelines already developed by the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), WHO position papers on measles and rubella and guidelines and articles on the progress towards measles elimination produced by Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, USA. The first draft of these guidelines was reviewed by staff of the vaccine preventable diseases and immunization programme of the Regional Office and then by staff of the Global Immunization Division, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. The document was also shared with country managers of the Expanded Programme on Immunization and surveillance and laboratory staff of all countries in the Region. In 2008, the guidelines were further reviewed during an intercountry meeting on measles held in the United Arab Emirates and by members of the regional measles/rubella technical advisory group. Finally, the document was reviewed by the surveillance officer focal point for measles at WHO headquarters. All steps have been taken to identify and manage any circumstances that could give rise to a conflict of interest. The development process was reviewed and approved by the WHO Guidelines Review Committee.

These field guidelines for the surveillance of measles, rubella and CRS are to be used as technical resource material in developing comprehensive standard operating procedures for measles, rubella and CRS surveillance. The largest part of these guidelines is devoted to developing a surveillance system for cases of measles, rubella and CRS, including case investigation, outbreak response, laboratory procedures for measles and rubella testing and surveillance monitoring and feedback.

This publication is primarily intended for use by surveillance and national immunization managers

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