

Editorial

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According to the World Health Organisation, reported worldwide measles cases increased by 79% in the first 2 months of 2022 with about 17,338 measles cases reported worldwide in January and February 2022, compared to 9,665 in the same period in 2021. It is estimated from report that in 2021, about 9 million measles cases and 128 000 related deaths occurred globally. By April 2022, about 21 large and disruptive measles outbreaks had been reported globally in the last 12 months with the majority of cases being reported in Africa and the East Mediterranean region.



Figure 1: Measles rash in a teenage boy in Zambia

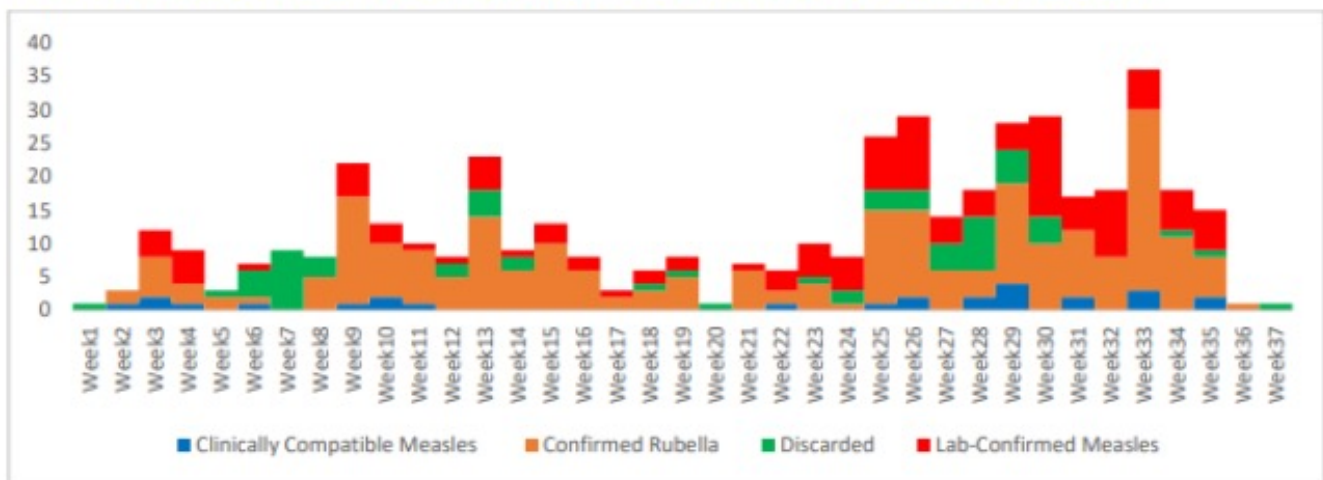
Measles is a highly contagious and deadly disease which can be prevented by vaccinations. To assure a protected community, the experts advise a vaccination coverage equal to or above 95% with 2 doses of the safe and effective measles vaccine can protect children against measles.

This resurgence of measles even in countries that reached elimination goals is concerning and has been attributed to a disruption in healthcare services including the immunization programs. The declines in vaccine coverage, weakened measles surveillance, and continued interruptions and delays in immunization activities due to COVID-19 contributed to the resurgence.

Zambia has continued to report measles cases from several districts with national positivity rates above 5% for the past three consecutive years (2020 to 2023). The disease affected persons aged zero (0) to 59 years, the majority being below 5 years.

In 2022, by epidemiological week a cumulative 422 confirmed cases (laboratory confirmed, epidemiologically linked and compatible) and 37 deaths had been recorded in the country. Of all the cases, the majority were in North-western province (235), followed by Lusaka province (234) and then in Southern province (188) and of the deaths the majority were in Southern province (21) followed by North-western Province (11) and then Lusaka province which recorded 5 deaths.

Final classification case by Epidemiological week (EW) Zambia, 2022 data as of Week 38.



Evidently, Zambia should fuss over the ongoing measles outbreak affecting mostly children. The statistics are an indication of pockets of poorly immunized populations. A Supplementary Immunisation campaign in high risk areas among those aged 15 years and below is recommended.