Measles outbreaks across Europe

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Sources:

- ProMED: promed@promedmail.org;
- Corriere della Sera: http://www.corriere.it/salute/pediatria/17_luglio_04/vaccini-obbligatori-la-scuola-12-10-altri-solo-raccomandati-b321b0ea-60cd-11e7-b845-9e35989ae7e4.shtml
- National Center for Surveillance and Control of Communicable Diseases, Romania: http://www.cnscbt.ro/
- Ministry of Health, Italy: http://www.salute.gov.it/portale/news/p3_2_1_1_1.jsp?lingua=italiano&menu=notizie&p=dalministero&id=2999

Since January 2016, 14 000 cases of measles have been reported across EU/EEA countries, with Romania and Italy being the worst affected.

At the top is Romania with a total number of confirmed measles cases, as of 14 Jul 2017, of 8017, including 31 deaths; second is Italy with 3346 cases and 2 deaths since the beginning of the year, as of 2 July 2017. Of note, in Italy 88% of measles cases were unvaccinated, 7% received only one dose of vaccine, 40% were admitted to the hospital, and 252 cases (7.5%) occurred among healthcare workers.

Other countries in Europe are also experiencing outbreaks of measles. Since the beginning of 2017 and as of 28 June 2017, Germany has reported 766 cases (in the same period in 2016, 130 cases were reported). Since the beginning of 2017 and as of 30 June 2017, Austria has reported 79 cases, a figure that exceeds the cumulative number of cases reported in 2016. Spain, Bulgaria and other European countries, at a lesser extent, are experiencing a rise in measles. Only Portugal, on 5 July 2017 declared the end of the measles epidemic.

Comment

Measles is spreading across Europe, despite vaccines which can prevent it. Death from measles is around 1 per 1000 cases. As of 12 July 2017, the ongoing outbreak has already caused 35 deaths in the WHO European region. Measles has a high contagious potential, i.e. according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) one person with the virus can spread it to another 11-18 people (average number of secondary infections). With such an infectious virus, outbreaks can only be prevented by a high vaccination coverage, i.e. more than 95%.

However, the national vaccination coverage remains less than 95% for the second dose of MMR in the majority of EU/EEA countries. In 2016, measles vaccination coverage in Italy was only 87.3%; in 2015 in Romania it was 85.5%. In Italy, the Ministry of Health is proposing to make MMR vaccination mandatory.
Efforts should be made for convincing people that measles is a dangerous and vaccine-preventable disease. Communication strategies should be strengthened in order to inform and influence individual and community decisions that enhance vaccination coverage.

Nicola Petrosillo & Eskild Petersen

ESCMID Emerging Infections Task Force