

UN health agency highlights importance of measles vaccine amid Europe outbreak

29 March 2017 – Hundreds of measles cases have been reported in Europe where the disease was believed to be nearing elimination leading the United Nations health agency to urge families to vaccinate their children and for national authorities to take urgent measures to stop transmission at the borders.

“Outbreaks will continue in Europe, as elsewhere, until every country reaches the level of immunization needed to fully protect their populations,” said Zsuzsanna Jakab, World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Europe.

At least 500 cases were diagnosed since this January, the majority in France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and Ukraine.

Measles are endemic in all of the above countries, and the estimated national immunization coverage with the second dose of measles-containing vaccine is believed to be less than the 95 per cent threshold.

“Measles continues to spread within and among European countries, with the potential to cause large outbreaks wherever immunization coverage has dropped below the necessary threshold,” WHO reported.

The largest outbreaks are in Romania, where more than 3,400 cases have been reported since January of last year, and in Italy, where more than 850 cases are expected in the coming weeks.

Measles is a highly contagious virus that remains endemic in most parts of the world. International standards recommend that the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine be given in two doses, starting at 12 to 15 months of age, and the second dose at 4 through 6 years of age.

“I urge all endemic countries to take urgent measures to stop transmission of measles within their borders, and all countries that have already achieved this to keep up their guard and sustain high immunization coverage. Together we must make sure that the hard-earned progress made towards regional elimination is not lost,” said Dr. Jakab.

Pro-poor urbanization, sustainable infrastructure can unlock Asia-Pacific's prosperity – UN

29 March 2017 – Some 400 million people in Asia and the Pacific still confront poverty as part of their daily lives due to widening income inequality, despite the region's impressive gains in reducing poverty in recent decades, a United Nations-backed report has found.

As outlined in the report, a renewed strengthening of the social contract is critical for addressing multi-dimensional poverty and the high marginalization and exclusion of people, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Shamshad Akhtar, told the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD 2017), according to a press release from ESCAP.

Titled *Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity in a Changing Asia-Pacific*, the report notes that on top of the 400 million people, or one in 10, living in extreme poverty, more than one in four people in the region's developing countries experience poverty in multiple dimensions, including additional deprivations that impact their health, education, and standard of living.

The report underscores the importance of addressing poverty through pro-poor urbanization, effective management of rural-urban transitions, and investment in sustainable infrastructure.

Although people in extreme income poverty are more likely to live in rural areas, they are increasingly found in cities, therefore provision of high quality, low-carbon, and resilient infrastructure is essential.

Asia's infrastructure needs are large and will only grow, with our recent report suggesting that the region will need \$1.7 trillion annually in climate-resilient infrastructure investments, said ADB's Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development, Bambang Susantono.

How our region chooses to bridge the infrastructure gap will have profound global implications. Concerted efforts, as highlighted in the tripartite report, can help us cover the last mile for infrastructure towards inclusive and sustainable development, he added.

Also addressing the forum was Haoliang Xu, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific.

As urbanization booms across Asia and the Pacific, its cities are powering innovation, economic growth, and prosperity, lifting many out of poverty. But there has also been an increase in inequality and exclusion in some regions, he said.

To be more inclusive and to leave no one behind, cities must adopt

innovative policies that align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and prioritize building the resilience of the most vulnerable groups," he added.

ESCAP, ADB, and UNDP also launched a new SDG Data Portal today to provide up to date data on SDG indicators for governments and stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific, along with an outlook assessment on SDGs in the region.

APFSD 2017 is being held by ESCAP in Bangkok from 29 to 31 March 2017. The conclusions and recommendations at the forum will inform discussions of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at the global level, to be convened in New York in July 2017.

[In Jordan, UN chief urges region's leaders to shape 'new Arab world' able to address differences through cooperation](#)

29 March 2017 – Addressing the League of Arab States Summit in Jordan today, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted the importance of unity among the countries in the region to confront the challenges it is facing.

"Divisions in the Arab world have opened the door to foreign intervention and manipulation, breeding instability, sectarian strife and terrorism," said Mr. Guterres.

"At this time of transition and upheaval, unity will be critical," he said, emphasizing: "I appeal to your leadership in shaping a new Arab world able to address and solve, by itself, differences through dialogue and cooperation."

In his remarks, the Secretary-General also underscored the importance of partnership between the UN and the Arab League and said that it was his responsibility to use his good offices, in cooperation with Member States, as an added dimension for conflict resolution.

"It is time to end the fighting in Syria," he said, expressing hope that the Astana process can achieve an effective ceasefire.

"By now it should be clear to all involved that while fighting terrorism is essential, any success will prove ephemeral without a political solution that allows the Syrian people to freely decide their own fate," he added, underlining the need, also, to support Syrian refugees in their hour

of need.

Further, welcoming the progress in retaking territories held by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), the UN chief expressed hope that the violence in Yemen and Libya can be resolved soon.

Turning to the peace process in the Middle East, Mr. Guterres underscored that the two-state solution is the only path to ensure that Palestinians and Israelis can realize their national aspirations and live in peace, security and dignity.

“There is no Plan B,” he stated.

Concluding in his address, the Secretary-General highlighted the importance of addressing youth unemployment as well as empowerment of women – both as a matter of human rights as well as a spur to human development.

“Let us recognize the power and responsibility that lies in our hands to improve the lives of the people we serve.”

Medicines should help, not harm, says UN health agency launching global patient safety ‘challenge’

29 March 2017 – Medicines should help, not harm, says UN health agency launching new global patient safety ‘challenge’

Underlining that medicines should fulfil their real purpose – help people, not harm them – the United Nations health agency today launched a world-wide ‘Challenge’ that seeks to reduce severe, avoidable medication-associated damage across the globe by half over the next five years.

“We all expect to be helped, not harmed, when we take medication,” said the Director-General of the UN World Health Organization (WHO), Margaret Chan, announcing the new campaign *Global Patient Safety Challenge on Medication Safety*.

“Apart from the human cost, medication errors place an enormous and unnecessary strain on health budgets. Preventing errors saves money and saves lives.”

According to estimates, the global cost associated with medication errors has been estimated at \$42 billion annually or almost 1 per cent of total global health expenditure. In terms of impact on the health of people, for instance

in the United States, medication errors cause at least one death every day and injure approximately 1.3 million people annually.

While low- and middle-income countries are estimated to have similar rates of medication-related adverse events to high-income countries, the impact is about twice as much in terms of the number of years of healthy life lost.

Furthermore, many countries lack good data, something that the new initiative will attempt to address.

The initiative will also improve the way medicines are prescribed, distributed and consumed, and increase awareness among patients about the risks associated with the improper use of medication.

It also urges countries to take early priority action to address key factors, including medicines with a high risk of harm if used improperly, patients who take multiple medications for different diseases and conditions, and patients going through transitions of care, in order to reduce medication errors and harm to patients.

The actions in the Challenge will focus on four areas: patients and the public, health care professionals, medicines as products, and systems and practices of medication.

The initiative also aims to make improvements in each stage of the medication use process including prescribing, dispensing, administering, monitoring and use and the UN health agency will disseminate guidance, and develop strategies, plans and tools to ensure that the medication process has the safety of patients at its core, in all health care facilities.

Over the years, I have spoken to many people who have lost loved ones to medication-related errors," said Sir Liam Donaldson, the WHO Envoy for Patient Safety. "Their stories, their quiet dignity and their acceptance of situations that should never have arisen have moved me deeply. It is to the memories of all those who have died due to incidents of unsafe care that this Challenge should be dedicated."

This is WHO's third global patient safety initiative, following the Clean Care is Safe Care challenge on hand hygiene in 2005 and the Safe Surgery Saves Lives challenge in 2008.

In special address, Chile's President spotlights efficacy of UN Human Rights

Council

29 March 2017 – Addressing a special meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Chilean President today stressed the importance of multilateralism and the work of the 47-member body.

“I raise my voice in support of the efficacy of the United Nations and the Human Rights Council,” said Michelle Bachelet, stressing the need for the UN to increase a regular budget allocation to the human rights agenda from the current three per cent.

“In my opinion, it is important to preserve the essence of the Council and to prevent it from being used for alternative purposes by any one State. We are all responsible for ensuring that the international system works as it is supposed to,” she said.

“One fundamental element is the principle of adherence to international law, which includes respect for treaties and preventing the misuse of mechanisms or institutions designed to resolve differences,” she added.

Chile has resisted dictatorship and has taken charge of the burdensome legacy of brutal human rights violations, she said.

Among other things, Chile has made a commitment to head an initiative against torture to prevent this crime from occurring and promote ratification of international instruments related to the issue, said Ms. Bachelet.

After having received numerous recommendations, Chile in November 2016 modified the Penal Code that defined the crime of torture according to three categories: physical, psychological and sexual violence.

The Government is also working on efforts to present a bill that would create a national preventative mechanism against torture within the national human rights institution.

In his video message, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, said that Chile has long been a strong human rights advocate at the international stage.

Chile has made great strides since the end of the dictatorship, but too many families still do not know the truth about what happened to their loved ones.

The right to truth for victims of gross human rights violations is inalienable. Any potential measure of pardon or early release for perpetrators must be carefully considered in light of human rights law, he said.