

## Indonesia's measles cases skyrocket amid paediatric vaccination lag

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**RI saw 32 times more measles cases in 2022 than the year before, amid a slump in routine pediatric immunizations blamed on the COVID-19 pandemic.(Shutterstock/Jarun Ontakrai)**  
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Indonesia saw 32 times more measles cases in 2022 than the year before, amid a slump in routine pediatric immunizations blamed on the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Health Ministry reported that 3,341 cases of measles were confirmed last year. They were found in 223 regencies and cities in 31 of the country's 34 provinces. Last year, more than a dozen cities and regencies, mostly located in Sumatra, declared "extraordinary health occurrences" (KLB) in response to measles outbreaks.

Authorities attributed the spike to the fact that many children had missed out routine childhood vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"At the start of the pandemic, [the government promoted a] slogan of 'stay at home', resulting in [parents] avoiding taking children for immunizations," Health Ministry director for immunization Yosephine Prima said at a press briefing on Friday. "Then we had the Delta [variant-fueled] wave of cases in 2021, which made people even more hesitant to leave their homes."

Nearly 60 percent of children infected with measles last year had not had a single dose of vaccine against the disease, and 12 percent of had had at least one dose. Health authorities could not ascertain the immunization status of the remaining share, according to Yosephine.

Common indicators for measles, one of the most contagious of vaccine-preventable diseases, are rashes and fever. But Yosephine said health authorities were more worried about the complications that could result from the disease, particularly among children with pre-existing health conditions. "If a child with poor nutrition [gets measles], it will usually be accompanied by severe complications, including diarrhea, pneumonia, inflammation of the brain, or even an eye infection, which can lead to blindness," she said.

### **Increasing health monitoring**

As part of the national strategy to stamp out measles in 2023, Yosephine said the government had instructed local health agencies to increase health monitoring.

In addition, the Health Ministry had enlisted the help of the Home Ministry; the Education, Culture, Research and Technology Ministry; and the Religious Affairs Ministry in an initiative to bring the government's pediatric immunization program to all elementary schools in the nation.

The pandemic-induced drop in immunization coverage has been a national concern in recent months, particularly after authorities reported the country's first confirmed polio cases in four years in Aceh's Pidie regency. At least one patient had no prior immunization.

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Epidemiologist Dicky Budiman of Griffith University in Australia said the government's focus on the COVID-19 pandemic for the past three years was partly to blame for the rise of these infectious diseases.

"The government has been too focused on just administering COVID-19 vaccines, as it allocated most health workers for this [during the pandemic], which led to the emergence of other diseases," he said on Tuesday.

The Indonesian Pediatrician Association's (IDAI) head for infectious tropical diseases, Anggraini Alam, said more health emergencies would occur throughout the country if childhood immunization rates remained low.

"Many infectious diseases can be prevented simply by vaccines. If these are not administered, then get ready for outbreaks of various diseases to occur, including measles," she said, as quoted by Kompas.com.

Last year, the government began offering catch-up vaccinations for children who had missed their pediatric shots. — **asianews.network, Jakarta, January 26, 2023**