

Measles Partnership Fosters Resolve for Elimination

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February 13, 2003 — In January, 2001, five leading public health organizations met at the American Red Cross National Headquarters in Washington, D.C., to discuss the hundreds of thousands of preventable childhood deaths occurring annually in Africa from measles. Their willingness to help turned into a resolve for action with the formation of the Measles Initiative, a bold, long-term commitment dedicated to saving the lives of 1.2 million African children over a five-year period.

On Tuesday (Feb. 11), representatives from the five organizations - the American Red Cross, the United Nations Foundation, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund - reconvened at the Third Annual Partners for Measles Advocacy meeting to discuss the state of the Initiative and its progression towards attaining its five year goal.

During the two-day meeting, the founding participants and Initiative partners, including the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Pan American Health Organization and others, examined the success and challenges of the 17 mass vaccination campaigns conducted across Africa so far.

What became immediately evident was that only two years after its inception, the Measles Initiative has taken great strides.

“Right now, the Initiative is exceeding each of its targets, ahead of schedule and under budget,” said Dr. Mark Grabowsky, senior health advisor for the American Red Cross International Services.



Dr. Mark Grabowsky, senior health advisor for the American Red Cross, noted the key to the success of the Measles Initiative has been the high level of cooperation among partner organizations.

[Click here to learn more about the role of each Measles Initiative partner.](#)

Already, the Initiative has vaccinated more than 68 million children in Africa and prevented the loss of an estimated 100,000 lives.

“What we’ve accomplished through our partnership is extraordinary and proves that, by working together, no obstacle is too great to overcome,” said Marsha J. Evans, President and CEO of the American Red Cross.

A measles campaign is the coordinated effort of health workers, volunteers and communities to ensure that within a short period of time vaccination teams reach every child in the area, particularly those in the most at-risk group of 15 years of age and younger. Every vaccination is free.

“Measles accounts for 90 percent of all vaccine preventable deaths among Ghana’s children,” said Theresa Babero Nobiya of the Ghana Red Cross Society. “During the campaign, we were able to mobilize volunteers who would go door to door to each home, even in the more rural regions, to raise awareness about the Initiative. This way, people didn’t have to travel to other places - we came to their communities. By the end of the campaign, our volunteers had visited some 75,000 homes and we had prevented more than 11,000 deaths.”



Theresa Babero Nobiya of the Ghana Red Cross Society discussed the success of the Initiative in her country, where the lives of an estimated 11,000 children have been saved.

The campaign had other successes beyond the immediate mass vaccinations.

”The Measles Initiative has proved what a well-planned, partnered campaign can achieve and what level of support we can raise,” said Nobiya. “In Ghana, it opened a gateway to collaborating with other agencies, such as the Ministry of Health, in future health related activities.”

Challenges also presented themselves during the campaigns however, and included such things as logistics problems in the ‘cold chain’ (how a vaccine is transported from its origin to the arm of a child) and the implications of short-term planning.



United Nation Foundation's (UNF) Andrea Gay discusses UNF's commitment to children's health.

“Short-term plans run the risk of losing access to the supply of vaccines. One of the main things we have to keep in mind is the better, long-term planning we have, the more we will be able to achieve,” said Stephen Jarrett of the United Nations Children’s Fund.

As the meeting drew to a close, participants looked to the future of the Measles Initiative, knowing that at this rate, by 2005, their objective of saving an estimated 1.2 million lives will have been met, and measles deaths in Africa will have been reduced to near zero.

“I greatly look forward to the day when we can gather together to proclaim total victory over the scourge of measles in Africa...The day when not one African child dies unnecessarily from this highly preventable disease,” concluded Evans.

Related Links:

- [The Measles Initiative](#)
- [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#)
- [The United Nations Foundation](#)
- [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [The United Nations Children's Fund](#)
- [The World Health Organization](#)

ALSO:

Mark Grabowsky, an epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control, and also a senior advisor to the American Red Cross, provides the next presentation. The goal is to reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate for children under five years of age by the Millennium Goal of 2015. What's needed is to reduce child mortality by 10% each year for the next decade. Malaria and measles are the biggest threats to children. He cites Jeffrey Sachs' research that estimates Africa would save \$10 billion annually if measles deaths were eliminated. The Bank estimate the money saved from such an elimination would allow Africa to meet have its health care goals. WHO data over the last 13 years for measles and vaccines shows the death rates between rich and poor nations is widening.

Campaigns reduced measles deaths dramatically, practically to zero in Western Hemisphere. This has been replicated in parts of Africa. One of the positive consequences is that without diseases and deaths, the need for costly health services is also eliminated. Grabowsky talks about the importance of follow up campaigns to

ensure children are immunized at regular intervals. Costs for a number of measles campaigns is about 71 cents per child. He estimates catch up campaigns in Africa for measles would cost about \$215 million over four years, \$25 million per year for follow up campaigns, for a total of \$300 million by 2005 for sub-Saharan Africa. This would achieve 15 percent of the Millennium Goals for child mortality reduction He estimates a consistent immunization campaign can eliminate measles mortality by 2006.

Grabowsky then asks should the World Bank support measles campaigns in African countries at a cost of less than one dollar per child, with proven partners, to reduce child mortality by 15%, reduce pediatric hospitalizations by 10 percent, eliminate an important rich-poor disparity, with an economic return of \$10 billion per year?