

ECDC DIRECTOR'S PRESENTATION

Welcome address at Eurovaccine 2011

5 December 2011 at ECDC, Stockholm

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and distinguished colleagues,

I am very pleased to be able to welcome you this morning to the Eurovaccine 2011 meeting that ECDC is hosting.

At today's meeting we will be discussing the value of vaccination and I believe that some of the focus will also be on the resurgence of measles in Europe.

Measles is re-emerging in Europe – and in a dramatic way. In 2010 alone, more than 30 000 cases of measles were reported in the EU. The last European monthly measles monitoring report (EMMO), published on 18 October, brings the total number of measles cases reported so far in 2011 to more than 30 200.

EU countries are currently suffering from the highest burden of measles in the developed world. This is what I would like to talk to you about for the next ten minutes or so, and I would like to start by showing you a video clip that ECDC has just produced about measles.

(link to the measles video : <http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/press/ecdctv/Pages/player.aspx>)

As you saw in this short video clip, measles is still a threat to public health in Europe

It is a highly infectious disease, and contrary to what many may think, not a harmless disease and can in fact lead to serious complications.

Around 25% of those affected with measles need hospitalisation, due to complications such as pneumonia but also due to very high fever in young children. Sadly, during the first nine months of this year we have already had eight measles-related deaths and 23 cases of acute measles encephalitis in the EU countries.

Europe missed the important milestone of measles and rubella elimination by 2010. And today, the EU is the largest exporter of measles to the Americas.

Now the good news is that measles is a vaccine-preventable disease that can be eliminated.

To reach elimination, we need vaccination coverage of 95% of the population, with two doses of the MMR vaccine.

Outbreaks of measles across Europe in recent years are a sign that immunisation programmes are not reaching all children. It is sometimes difficult to connect to the vulnerable, so-called 'hard-to-reach populations'. But an even greater reason for unvaccinated children in Europe is that parents today are sometimes more worried about adverse effects than the disease itself.

Currently, France is experiencing a true measles epidemic in their country. So far, almost 14 000 cases of measles in France have been reported to the European Surveillance System (TESSy) for 2011. This means that France accounts for more than half of all the measles cases in Europe. And it is not only the very young that are affected: more than half are older children, young adults over 15 years.

So what can we do to stop the ongoing epidemic in Europe and eliminate measles?

Routine childhood vaccination systems need to be reinforced for the very young children. In addition, countries will need to run specific catch-up campaigns to protect all those children and young adults that missed the opportunity to get vaccinated. And most of all, effective communication is important to reinforce the trust of parents in vaccination.

Here the support of paediatricians, family practitioners and nurses is essential! Doctors need to be convinced that vaccination of measles is a priority to avoid epidemics and eliminate measles. They need to provide parents with balanced and evidence-based information to help them make informed decisions regarding vaccination.

The new elimination goal for measles has now been set to 2015.

The only way to reach this new commitment is to make sure that there is vaccine coverage of at least 95% in the population with two doses of the MMR vaccine.

Several EU countries are close to reaching this goal. Nevertheless, substantial commitment is needed and should involve all stakeholders. National and international public health bodies need to support the elimination programme.

The role of doctors and other frontline healthcare workers that are in direct contact with parents and children is paramount. From research it is clear that health professionals are the people most trusted by parents. Health professionals therefore have a decisive role to play and can make a difference in reaching the goal of measles elimination.

ECDC is committed to contribute in reaching this goal. We will support doctors and healthcare workers with effective communication tools and provide expert advice and methods regarding how to monitor and assess immunisation programmes.

ECDC is also working very closely together with WHO Euro on measles. Last week, a Measles Initiative press release was published saying that *'European Countries Must Take Action Now to Prevent Continued Measles Outbreaks in 2012'* and mentions the joint commitment of WHO Euro and ECDC.

It is now time for our action to reach the goal of measles elimination by 2015!