

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: MEASLES OUTBREAK

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This Information Bulletin is for information only. The Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

The Situation

On 25 October 2001 an outbreak of measles at Hagita School, 24 km from Alotau, the capital of Milne Bay Province, was reported. As of 29 October 25 percent of the student population of 506 were affected. Other schools in Alotau also reported cases of measles. According to the chief executive officer of Alotau General Hospital there are many more cases in the town area, settlements and outlying villages. As of 30 October, 16 health centres have reported measles in their districts. The affected areas include Dogura, Salamo, Daio, Hagita, Samarai, Alotau, Waterluma and Gamadodo in Milne Bay Province. The affected people are mostly high school children. However, there are new cases of three month old babies being treated. Areas outside Alotau district that have reported fresh cases of measles include Sehulea, Nube, Sideia and East Cape.

As of 2 November more than 6,000 people have been vaccinated against measles. "I wish we had reached the peak and the number of cases were going down. Unfortunately, we are still seeing an increase and new cases are being admitted every day," the hospital chief executive officer said. As of 10 November, the number of measles cases identified and reported was more than 600. At the Alotau hospital, there were more than 60 patients despite the hospital only having facilities for 35.

The National Health Department (NHD), with the help of the World Health Organization (WHO), has provided 2,000 more vials to immunize 20,000 people. The NHD and WHO are waiting for results from blood samples and are monitoring the situation. Additional vaccine will be organised by the Government with the support from donors if required.

Meanwhile the provincial health authority has prepared an Action Plan. As part of this, the Milne Bay branch of the PNG Red Cross is providing volunteer manpower, health education and community awareness.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

PNG Red Cross Milne Bay Branch was the first to identify cases of measles and has been actively involved since the first day. The Red Cross branch has been requested by the local health authorities to look after food and nutrition needs as well as provide volunteer manpower to build and maintain the immunisation booths. Senior branch officials, 20 volunteers (including the chairperson) and branch staff have been involved in assisting affected people and their families over the past 10 days.

The branch is continuing to three meals a day to more than 100 patients of isolated centres and schools. The branch has been attending daily briefing sessions with the health department and provincial emergency committee and has been monitoring the situation. The branch is actively involved in advocacy regarding the needs of affected people. Since day one, branch volunteers have been providing health education/awareness to prevent the spread of measles. They have been transmitting messages using loudhailers, conducting dissemination at immunisation booths as well as visits to communities. The volunteers have been visiting villages and advising communities to seek treatment as well as referring cases to hospitals and health centres.

The PNG Red Cross secretariat and Federation PNG delegation has been communicating daily with the branch, various departments and international organisations. Advice and limited financial support has been given to the branch to carry out the operation and this will continue.

The Federation regional delegation in Suva has alerted the Solomon Islands Red Cross Society on the outbreak as there are people travelling there from the province. The Solomon Islands Red Cross Society has begun awareness programmes related to measles in the areas where there is traffic from the affected province.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

For further details please contact :

- *The Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society National Society ; Phone ++(675) 3258577; Fax ++(675) 3259714; email hqpngrcs@dg.com.pg*
- *Satoshi Sugai, Phone 41 22 730 4273; Fax 41 22 733 0395; email sugai@ifrc.org*

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For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Head, a.i.
Relationship Management Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Head
Asia Pacific