

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 was reported at Hagita School, 24km from Alotau, the capital of Milne Bay Province. As of 29 October, 25% of the 506 students are affected. Other schools in Milne Bay have also reported measles. According to the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Red Cross branch in Milne Bay there are reports of other cases from around the town, settlements and outlying villages. Sixteen 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 have been cases of three-month-old babies seeking treatment.

Restrictions were imposed at high schools and an isolation unit set-up at the local hospital. The Health Department has started mass immunisation. However, immunisation booths have been closed since mid-day yesterday because they have run out of vaccines. This sparked trouble between locals and hospital staff and police intervened. The Health Department is facing numerous problems, including funding extra hospital beds, staff, vaccine and other necessities for prevention and treatment. The Alotau Hospital is overcrowded and patients are sleeping on the walkway.

A total of 5,000 people have been vaccinated. The number of cases at local hospitals and isolation centres is rising daily.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The PNG Red Cross Milne Bay branch was the first to identify cases of measles and has been involved since the first day of the outbreak. The Red Cross branch, which has one full-time qualified nurse, has been requested by local health authorities to look after the nutrition needs of sufferers as well as provide volunteer manpower to build and maintain immunisation booths. Senior branch officials and volunteers have been involved in assisting affected people and their families. Based on a local appeal, the branch has received food from the local community for distribution. However the amount collected will run out by the weekend or earlier if the number of cases increases.

The branch is supplying three meals a day to 150 patients of isolated centres and affected high school pupils. The branch has attended daily briefing sessions with the Health Department and Provincial Emergency Committee and has been monitoring the situation. The branch is advocating on behalf of affected communities helping to raise awareness of the issue and needs.

Coordination

The PNG Red Cross Society headquarters in Port Moresby and the Federation PNG delegation has been communicating with the branch, the Ministry of Health, WHO and UNICEF. Support is being given to the branch. A list of requirements is being put together by the branch. This will be coordinated with other agencies to avoid duplication.

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

For further details please contact :

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

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