

# 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

## Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Measles Epidemic

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*The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 185 countries.*

### In Brief

**This Bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the situation and the information available at this time. The Federation welcomes additional funding for the DPRK Health Programme for 2007. Click here for the [East Asia Appeal 2006-2007 \(with a focus on DPRK\): 2007 Outlook.](#)**

**Summary:** Since November 2006, some 3,000 people in 30 counties throughout the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK) have been diagnosed with cases of the measles. To date, there have been four reported deaths when on 4 January 2007, two children and two adults died from the illness and its complications like pneumonia. Local health facilities throughout the country are continuing to provide treatment to 1,013 patients. Confirmation of the measles came from the country's ministry of public health (MOPH) on 15 February, and information was shared at a joint meeting attended by representatives from the International Federation, the DPRK Red Cross Society, the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on 16 February 2007, which is also a public holiday in the DPRK. A mass vaccination campaign is currently underway.

### The Situation

Since November 2006, some 3,000 people in 30 counties throughout the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK) have been diagnosed with cases of the measles. To date, there have been four reported deaths when on 4 January 2007, two children and two adults died from the illness and its complications like pneumonia. The measles is caused by a virus and is a highly contagious respiratory infection. Patients with the measles often suffer from a total body-skin rash and flu-like symptoms, which may lead to more serious health conditions. Local health facilities throughout the country are continuing to provide treatment to 1,013 patients. Confirmation of the measles came from the country's ministry of public health (MOPH) on 15 February, and information was shared at a joint meeting attended by representatives from the International Federation, the DPRK Red Cross Society, the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on 16 February 2007, which is also a public holiday in the DPRK. A mass vaccination campaign is currently underway.

Indications of the disease were first reported in Ryanggang province's Pujon *ri*, Kimhyongjik county in November 2006. The disease was initially diagnosed as Rubella, based upon the clinical symptoms of the patients who were first identified as having the disease on 6 November in Pujon *ri* and some northern areas including Ryanggang province. As the disease could not be contained within these areas, it has subsequently spread throughout the country. According to the MOPH, confirmation of the measles could only be made on 15 February 2007.

Following indications of an epidemic, on 26 January the WHO supplied the MOPH with testing kits for further investigations into the possibility of an epidemic. 77 out of the 84 samples confirmed the immunoglobulin M (IgM) antibodies against the measles virus. The process of confirming the measles cases faced constraints, as the disease was thought to have been eradicated from the country in 1992 and there was an absence of recent cases. The national expanded programme on immunization (EPI) programme manager further added that the country's health care workers are not familiar with this disease due to its 15 year absence, complicated by the cases' atypical symptoms and different virus genotype (H1).

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The continued presence of the measles is accompanied by a risk of increasing cases and the further spread of the illness to other parts of the country. The MOPH has put forward a request to the International Federation, UNICEF, and the WHO for five million doses of the measles vaccine to immunize people from 7- 45 years of age. Children below the age of seven are already vaccinated against measles through routine immunization. Following recommendations from UNICEF, it was suggested that immunization be aimed for all people up to the ages of 39 years (including all infants and toddlers), which will increase the size of the target group to 12 – 13 million people.

The MOPH expressed its desire to start this campaign as soon as possible. It was agreed that UNICEF will take the lead on the planning and costing of the proposed nationwide measles immunization campaign and will inform all the stakeholders of the details. It was also agreed that Vitamin A drops will be administered with the measles vaccines if resources are available, but priority will remain with the measles immunization.

An initial rough estimate has placed the cost of five million doses with disposable syringes at USD 1.5 million. This estimated cost excludes the costs for transportation, distribution and training of staff, which would be covered by the MOPH.

Following UNICEF's suggestion, the MOPH will mobilize their EPI stock of measles vaccines to begin immunizing people in areas at high risk. UNICEF agreed to look into the availability of vaccines, make cost calculations and draft a plan of action. The WHO and the Federation agreed to contact their respective headquarters and back donors for consultation and support.

The Federation and the DPRK Red Cross have in place a system for the supply of drugs and medical materials to 2,000 health institutions in more than 60 out of 160 (accessible) counties in DPRK as part of the national society's annual activities. This compliments the national health system, contributing towards fulfilling the basic health needs of the country's populace.

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## How we work

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

### The Federation's Global Agenda

The International Federation's activities are aligned with under a Global Agenda, which sets out **four broad goals** to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

### Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

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