

No endemic transmission of measles in the Caribbean

The Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) says there has been no endemic transmission of measles in the Americas, including the Caribbean, since 2002.

PAHO said since Venezuela reported the last case in 2001, measles deaths have “disappeared from the region.” “These successes, achieved by the countries of the Americas with support from the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (WHO), make the Americas the first region in the world to eliminate one of the world’s most contagious diseases and a leading cause of death for young children,” said PAHO in a statement here. It said key reasons for the success include high rates of vaccination coverage in regional countries and early detection of cases. However, PAHO said the region continues to face the threat of imported cases from countries outside this hemisphere, where the virus still circulates. As of 2012, according to WHO estimates released last week, there were 226,722 measles cases and 122,000 deaths in other regions of the world. These figures represent declines of 77 percent in cases and 78 percent in deaths since 2000. “For more than a decade, there has been no endemic measles in the Americas, thanks to countries’ efforts to vaccinate children and maintain high coverage rates,” said Dr. Gina Tambini, director of PAHO’s Family, Gender and Life Course Department. “But until the rest of the world eliminates the disease, we must be on the alert for any reintroduction of cases that could lead to outbreaks and jeopardize the continuity of this public health milestone,” she added. Before the establishment of PAHO/WHO’s Expanded Immunization Program in 1977, more than 250,000 measles cases and 12,000 deaths were recorded yearly in the Americas. Starting in the 1990s, PAHO said cases declined, but the most notable drop came after the region launched a major measles elimination initiative in 1994. The last recorded endemic outbreak of measles was in Venezuela and Colombia in 2001-2002. PAHO said vaccination campaigns to eliminate rubella have helped to maintain measles elimination by using a combination measles and rubella vaccines for adolescents and young adults. A study on the cost-effectiveness of measles elimination in Latin America and the Caribbean, which included PAHO/WHO experts, estimated that the cost of preventing one measles case is US\$71.75, and preventing one death costs US\$15,000, indicating cost-effectiveness.