

## Special vaccine campaigns

Emerging pathogens and diseases and global population traveling have increased the tendency of disease outbreak threats all over the world. Vaccination campaigns are a method to deliver vaccines quickly to a larger population in endemic situations other than routine immunization schedules. The aim is to rapidly and efficiently protect the maximum number of susceptible persons. This will increase the population immunity /herd immunity in the setting of an existing or potential outbreak. Thereby the morbidity and mortality are expected to reduce. Further, it will accelerate disease control by rapidly increasing the coverage. Special vaccine campaigns can be conducted at the national or subnational level for one or more vaccines depending on the country's needs. Sri Lanka has undertaken special vaccine campaigns in the past for a few disease outbreaks as follows.

### Poliomyelitis

Unique vaccine campaigns were conducted yearly from 1995 for consecutive five years. Trivalent Oral Polio vaccine (TOPV) was given to all children under five years in the country on a single National Immunization Day (NID) followed by the administration of another dose four weeks later irrespective of the child's previous immunization status.

The program's objective was to interrupt the transmission of the wild Polio virus by attaining high immunization coverage with at least three doses of TOPV with the target of Polio eradication by the year 2000.

1<sup>st</sup> National Immunization Days (04.11.1995 and 09.12.1995)

2<sup>nd</sup> National Immunization Days (07.09.1996 and 12.10.1996)

3<sup>rd</sup> National Immunization Days (06.06.1997 and 11.10.1997)

4<sup>th</sup> National Immunization Days (19.09.1998 and 24.10.1998)

5<sup>th</sup> National Immunization Days (11.09.1999 and 09.12.1999)

National committee for certification of Polio eradication (NCCPE) convened

## Measles

Sri Lanka experienced an unexpected massive measles outbreak in October 1999, where 15,000 suspected cases of measles were reported to the Epidemiology Unit. The outbreak was predominantly among unvaccinated adolescents. In response to this outbreak, an island-wide measles catch-up campaign was launched.

2003 – 1<sup>st</sup> Measles special immunization campaign

Target group - Initially targeting unvaccinated adolescent cohort aged 10-14 years in 2003 with high coverage of 95%.

2004 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Measles special immunization campaign

Target group-16-20-yearold cohort was immunized using Measles-Rubella vaccine (MR) with 72% coverage. This outbreak lead to the introduction of a second dose of Measles containing vaccine.

During 2013-2015, on the verge of elimination, Sri Lanka experienced another measles outbreak where around 3000 cases were reported predominantly among unvaccinated infants. In response to this outbreak, the country carried out a national-level supplementary immunization activity (SIA).

2013- Measles Supplementary Immunization Activity (SIA) – 05.07.2013

Target group-Children aged 6 months to 12 months. All children of this age group were given a dose of the Measles vaccine irrespective of the past history of clinical measles.

Following this outbreak, it was decided to revert to the MMR 1st dose at 9 months of age, continuing the second dose at 3 years.

## Rubella

A rubella epidemic occurred in Sri Lanka in 1994 and 1995, which led to 275 and 169 Congenital Rubella Syndrome (CRS) cases respectively. In response to this outbreak, the Rubella vaccine was introduced into the National Immunization Program in 1996, with the objective of preventing CRS followed by a special campaign.

1996 - An island-wide community-based Rubella vaccination program.

Target group-All reproductive-aged women of 15-44 years

Later, in order to control Rubella transmission, both male and female children were immunized against Rubella with two vaccines through the National Immunization Program; the monovalent rubella vaccine was introduced in 1996, and Measles and Rubella vaccine (MR) in 2001.

2003- Rubella vaccine campaign

Target group- All children aged 10-14 years

2004- Rubella vaccine campaign

Target group- All youth aged 16-20 years in order to achieve immunization coverage.

## COVID-19

Sri Lanka reported the first case of COVID-19 on 27th January 2020 and thereafter several clusters were experienced in different intensities which were controlled. The outbreak control activities continued while the whole country is functioning normally, without travel restrictions and continued humanitarian expatriation activities which also contributed to some imported Covid19 cases to the country. In this background, the Ministry of Health decided to introduce a safe and efficacious Covid19 vaccine at the earliest possible instance. Considering the high priority requirement of safeguarding essential healthcare facilities for the nation, adhering to global Covid-19 vaccination prioritization guidelines and recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Communicable Diseases (NITAG for the country), the healthcare staff and other support frontline workers (from defense, police/STF, services at ports of entry) were offered the initial 3 vaccine stocks receiving to the country in January 2021. Other priority groups were attended to with the receipt of consecutive vaccine stocks. Subsequently, the general public was included and COVID-19 immunization was conducted through special vaccination campaigns conducted in 2021, and 2022 and continued to 2023.