

February 2018

Statement by the Scandinavian Verification Committee for Measles and Rubella Elimination

Measles is a highly contagious disease. Vaccination against measles has been an integrated part of the childhood vaccination schedules of the three Scandinavian countries for 30 years or more. Sustained high coverage and wide public acceptance of measles- mumps- rubella (MMR) vaccination has reduced the incidence of measles. According to WHO measles was eliminated in Scandinavia in 2016.

To maintain interruption of measles transmission and elimination in the Scandinavian countries a continuous high population immunity across all ages is essential. This should be obtained by a persistent high vaccine uptake in children reaching at least 95% with two doses of MMR vaccine and by vaccination with at least one dose of MMR vaccine to non-immune adults not previously vaccinated or having had the diseases. Evidence shows that susceptible individuals across all ages are at risk of the diseases, either by brief encounters with an (often unidentified) infectious individual visiting Scandinavia or when travelling to areas where measles is still endemic. In 2016, the SVC recommended easy access to all non-immune adults, preferably free of charge (1).

Health-care workers¹ are at increased risk of measles compared to the general population. Measles transmission in health-care settings pose substantial risk of infection for infants and immunocompromised individuals. There have been numbers of outbreaks in health facilities in Europe including Scandinavia. Health facilities remain a commonly reported setting for measles transmission. **Therefore, the Scandinavian Verification Committee for Measles and Rubella Elimination calls for responsible public health authorities in Denmark, Norway and Sweden to provide easy access to vaccination against measles, free of charge, to all their non-immune health-care workers.**

Background:

The Scandinavian Verification Committee (SVC) for Measles and Rubella Elimination was officially set up on 3 June 2014. It comprises 12 public health specialists, virologists, epidemiologists and clinicians from the three Scandinavian countries Sweden, Norway and Denmark appointed by their respective national health authorities but working as an independent expert committee. The committee's main tasks are to provide WHO Europe and the RVC for Europe (2) with annual reports on the status of measles and rubella elimination in the Scandinavian countries and to encourage authorities to implement appropriate strategies towards elimination goals. Data from one country is evaluated by committee members from another country to ensure full independence.

¹WHO defines health care workers as "all persons involved in patient care such as health care professionals, residents, students, laboratory staff, administrative and service staff as well as persons in public health such as field workers, epidemiologists, laboratory staff and community health workers". http://www.who.int/immunization/policy/immunization_routine_table4.pdf

References:

(1) Statement by the Scandinavian Verification Committee (SVC) for Measles and Rubella Elimination on MMR vaccine to non-immune adults. November 2016.

(2) http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/348013/6th-RVC-final-for-web-posting.pdf

Contact:

Denmark: Dr. Peter Henrik Andersen (SVC member), Afdelingslæge, Statens Serum Institut, København e-mail: pea@ssi.dk, tel.: +45 32683265

Norway: Dr. Øystein Rolandsen Riise (SVC chair), Overlege, Nasjonalt Folkehelseinstitutt, Oslo e-mail: oysteinrolandsen.riise@fhi.no, tel.: +47 (0)21076782

Sweden: Ingrid Uhnöo (SVC secretary), Institutionen för medicinska vetenskaper, Uppsala Universitetssjukhus: e-mail: ingrid.uhnöo@telia.com, tel.: +46 (0)10-5084703