

32nd World Pediatrics Conference

December 04-05, 2019 | Barcelona, Spain

Evaluation of measles epidemic in Albania, Balkan and Europe

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According to WHO in 2017 there were 110,000 Measles deaths globally, mostly among children 0-5 years old. European countries have reported an increase in number of Measles cases in the last 3 years (114,682), 83,540 cases in 2018. 25,869 cases in 2017, compared to only 5,273 cases in 2016. In Albania there were 1,955 confirmed cases, the majority in non immunized children 0-5 years old. Outbreaks in France, Italy, Serbia, Ukraine, Greece and North Macedonia placed measles cases at record-breaking levels in Europe. There was a 300% increase in Measles confirmed cases in European countries such as Ukraine with 113,693 cases, followed by Romania (12,275), Italy (9,572), France (5,734), Serbia (5,793), Greece (3,288), North Macedonia (1,953), Bosnia Hercegovina (1,493) and Bulgaria (1,294). In Albania the incidence rate of Measles was 4,141 / 1,000,000 children (0-5 years old), compared to 13,599 / 1,000,000 in Ukraine, 17,459 / 1,000,000 in North Macedonia and 7,724 / 1,000,000 in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is crucial to understand the reasons behind these Measles epidemics. Measles is almost entirely preventable through two doses of MMR, a safe and effective vaccine. According to WHO the recommended immunization rate is above 95% for general population. Unfortunately, European countries have reported a fast decline in immunization rates. In Albania, immunization rates have shown regress in recent years from 94% in 2008-2009 to 75% in 2017-2018 according to Albania Demographic and Health Survey 2017-2018. According to WHO/UNICEF in North Macedonia there is a decrease in immunization rates from 96% in 2013 to 83% in 2019, while Ukraine reports 80% immunization rates in 2019. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there is a decrease from 87% immunization coverage in 2013 to 77% in 2017.

We agree that elimination of Measles epidemic and ultimately complete eradication of this deadly infectious disease will depend largely on EVAP (European Vaccine Action Plan 2015-2020) actions. Obtaining political commitment, achieving high coverage and closing immunity gaps and ensuring high quality, case based surveillance will improve the current Measles epidemic in Europe. We believe that parents are the key to achieve maximum immunization rates. Finding the socio-economic parental groups that hesitate to vaccinate their children and understanding their concerns it would be as important as providing high quality vaccines and case based surveillance.

Biography

Ledia Qatipi has completed her Medical School in 1999 from University of Medicine, Tirana, Albania and postgraduate studies in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics from Staten Island University Hospital, New York, USA. Currently she works as Senior MD at ABC Health Center, part of ABC Health Foundation, a nonprofit organization in Tirana, Albania, that gives affordable medical care to the urban and rural communities and underserved children. She also served for 10 years as a Quality Improvement Committee Board member of BCCHC (Beacon Christian Community Health Center, Staten Island, New York). She has published more than 10 papers in reputed journals in USA and Europe.

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