

MEASLES OUTBREAK IN NORTH KOREA

The International Red Cross as recently acknowledged an outbreak of measles in North Korea, the latest in a round of epidemics to plague the country. A report stated that since November 2006, measles has been found in thirty counties throughout the North. As of February 11, North Korean authorities officially notified the Red Cross, the World Health Organization, and other international agencies of the outbreak, requesting five million doses of measles vaccine, at a cost of approximately 1.5 million U.S. dollars.

Vaccination for measles in North Korea has been high in the past, with 98 percent vaccination in 1990, and 96 percent in 2005, yet while this was the trend, there were several years, such as 1997-1998, when vaccines were available for only 40 percent of the population. In addition, these numbers indicate only single-dose vaccinations, when most developed countries have now adopted double-dose coverage.

This is only the latest in a series of epidemics to hit North Korea, as South Korean interest groups have been addressing the spread of Scarlet Fever and other communicable diseases that seem to be plaguing the North as years of malnutrition have weakened the general populace's resistance to disease.

The Red Cross report stated that over 3,000 people have been diagnosed with the disease. Although only four deaths have been attributed to the outbreak, only 1,013 people are currently receiving treatment.