Key challenges for Eliminating Measles in the Maldives

- Sustaining gains given the dispersed geography of the island nation
- Importation of Measles especially given the high tourist inflow and migrant workers
- High turnover of staff and reliance on expat workers for health care

The Game Plan for Success

The Political: Immunization is declared as the basic right of the children in the Maldives and Article 23 of Constitution guarantees every citizen of the right to universal and quality health care. According a high priority to the National Immunization Programme, political leadership has ensured a network of health facilities and health workers across the island nation reach to every child with immunization services. Steadfast commitment is demonstrated by ensuring inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial coordination e.g. with education and tourism for ensuring immunization in all target population.

The Technical: The National Immunization Programme provides quality services throughout the country. WHO and UNICEF as key partners have provided technical and logistic support to set up immunization services and attain excellence. Maldives Technical Advisory Group on Immunization also provides advocacy and guidance for the programme. Interruption of measles transmission in the country has been achieved as a result of these concerted efforts and outcome of decades of high routine immunization coverage, successful periodic mass measles vaccination campaigns, good surveillance system ably supported by Laboratory, and early detection and response to outbreaks. In partnership with the Ministry of Education, verification of completion of childhood vaccinations was made mandatory at school entry.

The Social: Immunization sessions were planned and delivered through the involvement of community and community leaders. Acceptance of vaccination and recognition that it is life-saving for children ensured community participation in immunization sessions and mass campaigns. High literacy rate of the population improved recognition of health education messages.

The Financial: Government of Maldives exclusively funds the National EPI Programme ensuring that there are no constraints to achieving and sustaining high immunization coverage.
Sustaining Measles Elimination

Maldives’ sustainability plan includes the Measles and Rubella vaccine replacing the Measles only vaccine at 9 month of age followed by Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine at 18 months of age. Mass measles and rubella vaccine campaign was held in 2017 to protect 8-25 year old people to bridge the immunity gap. The sustainability plan focusses on early detection of the imported measles virus and response. The National Reference Laboratory of the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital has built the capacity for diagnosing the measles virus using the RT-PCR, a major upgrade of measles diagnosis from the current method of IgM identification. Ministry of Health in consultation with and advice from experts is working on a policy to prevent re-establishment of measles transmission in the country.

-- HE Abdulla Nazim Ibrahim, Health Minister, Maldives
-- Dr. Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director, WHO-SEARO

Maldives has demonstrated how a highly contagious virus like Measles can be eliminated. WHO commend the country for this momentous public health achievement, which is a boost to the Region’s effort to eliminate Measles and control Rubella.

The Game Changers
- Sustained political commitment and decades of domestic financing
- Immunization declared as the basic right of the children of the Maldives
- Universal Health Coverage and highly accessible Health Systems
- Sustained high immunization coverage of more than 95% of all EPI vaccines
- High quality surveillance and use of data for action
- Multi-sectoral and multi partner approach

Freedom from fear:
Maldives celebrates Measles elimination

In 2017, Maldives was validated as one of the first countries in WHO South East Asia Region to have successfully eliminated Measles. This achievement is the culmination of the steadfast political commitment of the Government of the Maldives, a robust Expanded Program on Immunization offering vaccines against 10 diseases, quality surveillance program, continued and quality technical support from WHO and partners and the unflagging determination of frontline health workers.

The people, especially children, of the Maldives can now live without fear of highly infectious measles and its complications.