



spotlight on health

Protecting Africa's Children From Measles

by Jane Seymour

(NAPSA)—Each year, a disease barely remembered by most Americans kills nearly one million children, a half million of those in Africa alone. This fact makes measles the single leading cause of death among children in Africa—more than AIDS, more than tuberculosis and more than malnutrition. In a place where health conditions are extremely poor, living conditions are more than difficult, and access to health care is minimal, measles can be easily prevented with a simple vaccination.

Virtually every community in Africa is affected by measles.

- Measles attacks skin surfaces (gut, cornea, lungs) and attacks the immune system so children die of complications from measles including diarrhea, pneumonia and blindness.

- Visible signs of measles include fever, rash, runny nose, cough, red eyes, red lips, peeling of the skin, and difficulty breathing.

The Measles Initiative is a long-term commitment to control measles deaths in Africa by vaccinating 200 million children in 36 sub-Saharan countries, through both mass and follow-up campaigns, preventing 1.2 million deaths over five years.

The largest vaccination campaign to date was held during one week in Kenya. During a single week in June 2002, 13.3 million Kenyan children were vaccinated against the disease. As a result of the efforts of the Red Cross and its Measles Initiative partners,



Measles is one of the most prevalent—and deadly—diseases in Africa.

100 percent of the country's children between 9 months and 14 years received the necessary vaccinations, which saved approximately 18,000 lives.

The good news is twofold. First, measles vaccination is the most cost-effective public health intervention available for preventing deaths; it costs less than a dollar to vaccinate a child against measles. Second, the success of the Measles Initiative and partnership strengthens other health initiatives in Africa.

The Measles Initiative is led by the American Red Cross, United Nations Foundation, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund. Other key players in the fight against measles include the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and countries and governments affected by measles.

To learn more, visit the Web site at www.measlesinitiative.org.