

Introduction

Expanded Programme on Immunizations remains one of the most important cost-effective approaches towards reducing vaccine-preventable diseases among infants worldwide (WHO, 2013). Presently, immunization coverage has improved worldwide with about 130 countries achieving 90% DPT3 coverage. Over 640 million children vaccinated, 9 million future deaths averted, and more than \$100 billion spent on averting illness globally (GAVI 2017). The Master of Public Health students of School of Tropical Medicine and Global Health, Nagasaki University, Japan, as part of their field trip in March 2018, explored the Philippines' health system and interventions implemented with specific focus on EPI activities.

Location, Observations and Findings

The Philippines is one of the South-East Asian Island countries. It has 17 regions, out of which two regions were visited: Manila, the national capital and Eastern Visayas. There were lectures, participation in conference-type discussions on EPI, visit to health delivery points such as Barangay health stations and interactions with staff and Barangay volunteers. Other administrative places supporting the Philippines health system like Department of Health, WPRO, San Lazaro Hospital were visited.

Observations showed Philippines considered EPI as a key indicator of quality health care. The EPI programme has improved over the years and continues to make gains while introducing new vaccines. However, the Philippines Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS), 2017, reported 70% immunization coverage for fully immunized children compared to 86% global coverage (WHO 2018). This could plausibly be attributed to the dengue vaccine scare, numerous islands that are hard to reach, human resources, in addition to vaccine supply management and distribution. Measles outbreak recently occurred in metro-Manila. According to the PDHS 2017, measles vaccination coverage is 80.4% yet there are sporadic measles outbreaks. This coverage is below global target of 95% and might have contributed to the sporadic outbreaks, whilst a sustained coverage of ≥90% would prevent outbreaks as shown in figure 2.

Figure 1: Immunization coverage in the Philippines by region – 2017

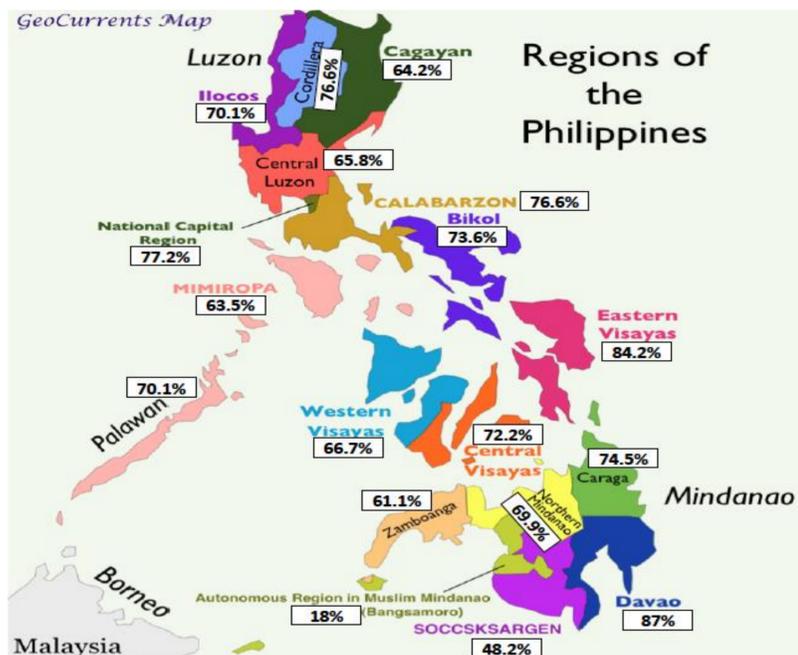
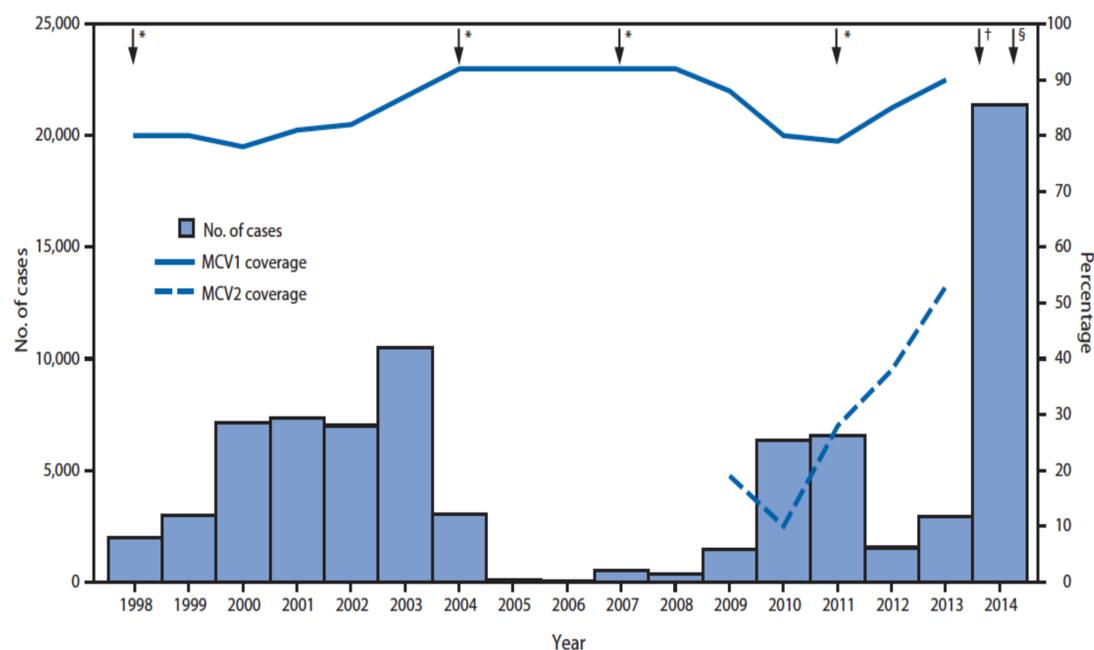


Figure 2: measles vaccination coverage and reported cases in the Philippines 1998 -2014



Source: CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Vol. 64/ No. 13. April 2015.
*MCV: Measles Containing Vaccine

Strengths of the Philippines EPI Programme

- * Strong health system
- * Enthusiastic workforce
- * Dedicated and motivated Barangay Health Volunteers

Lessons learnt

- * Barangay health workers bridge health facility and community relations
- * Access can improve service utilization
- * Health care rumours can negatively affect public health services such as immunizations

Strategies adopted to improve immunization coverage

By DOH Philippines

- *Generate demand for immunization services and build-up multi-sectoral support for national immunization programme
- *Strengthen surveillance and response
- *Build up supervision, monitoring and evaluation
- * Institute supportive governance, financing and regulatory measures

WHO country office support to Philippines EPI

- * Strengthening the national immunization programme
- * Strengthening the vaccine national regulatory authority
- * Strengthening vaccine-preventable disease surveillance
- * Achieving elimination of measles, and maternal and neonatal tetanus
- * Developed mass media campaign videos/messages to encourage caregivers to vaccinate their children

WPRO

- * Developed the regional framework for implementation of the "global Vaccine Action Plan in the Western Pacific" (2012-2020)
- * Empower national immunization programmes through policy and strategy development
- * Cooperation and partnership
- * Scaling up advocacy
- * Improve monitoring and surveillance systems
- * Provide guidance for immunization and multi-year strategic plans
- * Improving data quality, analysis, utilization and for decision making support

Conclusion

- * The Philippines has a strong health system with an enthusiastic workforce
- * Immunizations reduce morbidity and mortality due to vaccine preventable diseases and the Philippines have introduced more innovative strategies to improve their coverage and are being supported by WHO country office and WPRO.
- * Good opportunity for students to acquire practical skills and knowledge about public health interventions

References:

GAVI Alliance for vaccines, (2017), Annual progress report, accessed on May 4 2018 (www.gavi.org/progress-report/).

Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) and ICF. (2018). Philippines National Demographic and Health Survey 2017: Key Indicators. Quezon City, Philippines, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: PSA and ICF.

WHO, 2013, World Immunization Week, accessed on June 15 2018, (<http://www.who.int/campaigns/immunization-week/2013/en/>).

WHO, 2018, Immunization Fact Sheets, accessed on June 15, 2018 (<http://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/immunization-coverage>).