

Understanding the Spatial and Temporal Patterns of Measles Infections in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT:

Measles is a very contagious disease and it is particularly virulent for children under the age of five in developing nations. Statistics from the Federal Ministry of Health in Nigeria indicate measles endemicity despite vaccination and immunization efforts. This paper examines why there is a high prevalence of measles infections in Nigeria and explores the geographic pattern of measles morbidity and mortality. The results show that school enrollment accounts for high measles rate in the country. Local customs, belief systems, political power, environmental factors, and health practices may also explain the geographic variability in infection rate. The study also found that inadequate data on infectious diseases like measles may hamper effective management of epidemics. Therefore, the paper suggests the need for sustainable immunization programs and the design of a better method of generating health data for management purposes.

INTRODUCTION

Measles is a highly contagious disease and considered a deadly killer of children under the age of five worldwide. It is particularly virulent for children in developing nations (Kumar et al., 1990; Hartter et al., 2000; and World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). According to the WHO (2002), there were 26 million measles infections worldwide that resulted in the deaths of over 745,000 people in 2001. These global statistics negate the previously noted claim and hope of the WHO to replace all infectious diseases with non-infectious diseases by the year 2000 (Mayer, 2000). In Nigeria, statistics from the Ministry of Health indicate endemic levels of measles with high morbidity and mortality rates despite the efforts to immunize residents (Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) 1985 to 2001). This paper examines the prevalence rates of measles in Nigeria and offers suggestions to ameliorate the disease burden. It also examines the spatial pattern of measles morbidity and mor-