

# Overseas Briefs

Source: World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)

## *Viral meningitis, Gaza*

A marked increase in the number of cases of meningitis was reported by the health services in the Gaza strip in late May and early June. Most cases were in children in the 2-5 years age group. Symptoms were mild with few complications and no deaths. The increase was detected through improved surveillance for infectious diseases established by health authorities in accordance with WHO recommendations. All cases of suspected meningitis are notified and investigated in the laboratory. From January to May 1997, 180 cases of meningitis were reported compared with 121 during the same period in 1996. The increase in 1997 was particularly marked in the fourth week of May in the northern part of the Gaza Strip. Bacterial meningitis was confirmed in 54 cases, mainly due to *Neisseria meningitidis*, but *Haemophilus influenzae*, *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and other bacteria were also identified. During the first 10 days of June, 157 cases of meningitis were reported to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, with the daily numbers increasing from 4 on 1 June to 26 on 10 June. All parts of the Gaza Strip were affected by the outbreak but the highest rate was in the north. Of the 157 cases investigated 149 were diagnosed

as aseptic meningitis. Echoviruses and other enteroviruses have been isolated from these cases.

## *Measles, Brazil*

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is working closely with the authorities in Sao Paulo to control the resurgence of measles there. During 1997, 846 suspected cases of measles have been reported to the Ministry of Health, Sao Paulo. Of these, 383 (45.3%) have been laboratory confirmed, 127 (15%) excluded, and 336 (39.7%) are still being tested. Five deaths have been reported, all in infants less than one year of age. The age of the confirmed cases ranges from 2 months to 44 years. The highest attack rate is for children under one, followed by adults 20 to 29 years and children 1 to 4 years of age. Infants and young adults who have not been vaccinated seem to be at highest risk. Since 1990, when the last major outbreak of measles occurred in Sao Paulo, few cases have been reported. An advisory panel established by the Ministry of Health has recommended a special vaccination campaign to control the outbreak, directed at children between the ages of six months and 4 years. This began in June 1997.

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