

# Overseas infectious diseases of priority concern

This surveillance report presents information on overseas infectious diseases of priority concern to border health. These diseases include Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEICs) and other infectious diseases of priority concern to New Zealand. The data reported is the latest calendar year data available as at July 2026.

## Key facts

- Poliovirus cases remained high in African countries in 2025, particularly Nigeria (73 cases), Ethiopia (40 cases), and Chad (55 cases).
- Mpox cases at the global level increased between 2023 (9,666 cases or 1.2 cases per million people) and 2025 (53,562 cases, or 6.6 cases per million people). A surge of cases, including the emergence of a new strain, led the WHO to declare Mpox a PHEIC again in August 2024 and to maintain it as a PHEIC as of 2025.
- Measles cases increased steadily between 2022 (25.7 cases per million people) and 2024 (82.8 cases per million people), and vaccination rates remained lower than optimal.
- Non-seasonal influenza was reported in 3 countries in 2025, decreased from 10 countries in 2024.

## Background information

High-risk exotic diseases, potentially harmful to New Zealand's health, are those which:

- spread easily
- New Zealand people are particularly vulnerable to (eg, non-immune)
- can cause severe illness
- are difficult to treat.

Exotic diseases overseas can be spread to New Zealand by New Zealand travellers, visitors, and immigrants. International air travel can spread diseases very quickly across borders. Monitoring high-risk exotic diseases overseas is important because it can inform us about the possible exposures of New Zealand travellers, visitors, and immigrants to diseases, and help target our disease prevention and control work.

## Public Health Emergencies of International Concern

The World Health Organization (WHO) can declare Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEICs) when public health events arise that have international reach and may require an internationally coordinated response (WHO 2019). At the time of this report, in September 2026, there were two active PHEICs: Polio and Ebola. The PHEIC for Mpox ended on 5 September 2025.

On 17 May 2026, the WHO determined that the Ebola disease caused by the Bundibugyo virus in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), but does not meet the criteria of pandemic emergency, as defined in the International Health Regulations (IHR) (WHO 2026). At the time of this report, we do not have sufficient data from the WHO, so we will exclude Ebola from the analysis.

Respiratory illnesses, including measles, non-seasonal influenzas and Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), are also considered priority notifiable diseases for New Zealand. In addition, Dengue Fever, the most common arboviral disease (disease carried by insects) entering New Zealand, is also reported here.

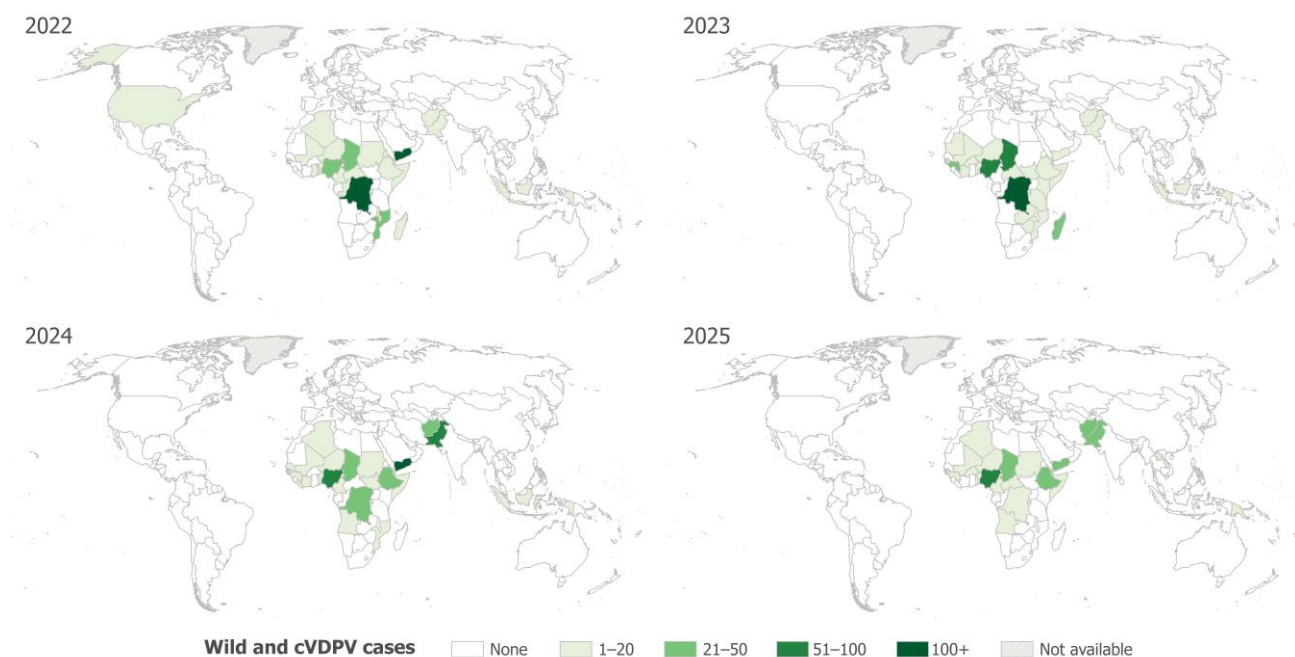
## Polio cases remain elevated globally

Poliomyelitis (polio) is a viral disease that can cause severe neurological disability and sometimes death. In addition to wild polio virus, a weakened form of polio from oral polio vaccine (circulating vaccine derived polio virus, or cVDPV) may cause polio in places where vaccination coverage is low (Venkatesan 2022). An injectable inactivated polio vaccine has replaced the oral polio vaccine in many countries, including New Zealand. For more information, visit the [Health New Zealand website](#).

From 2022–2025, three countries recorded cases of wild polio virus: Pakistan (131 cases), Afghanistan (54 cases), and Mozambique (8 cases) with all other cases being cVDPV.

The total combined number of reported cases of wild polio and cVDPV increased from 137 in 2018 to 1,253 in 2020. The number of cases decreased to 697 in 2021 before increasing again to 905 in 2022. From 2022 onwards, the number of cases declined to 541 in 2023 and 562 in 2024, before decreasing substantially to 294 in 2025. African countries were most affected, with 714 cases in 2022 and 188 cases in 2025. In 2025, the highest case numbers were in Nigeria (73 cases) and Ethiopia (40 cases), followed by Chad (35 cases) and Yemen (31 cases) (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Reported cases of wild poliovirus and cVDPV by country, 2022–2025**



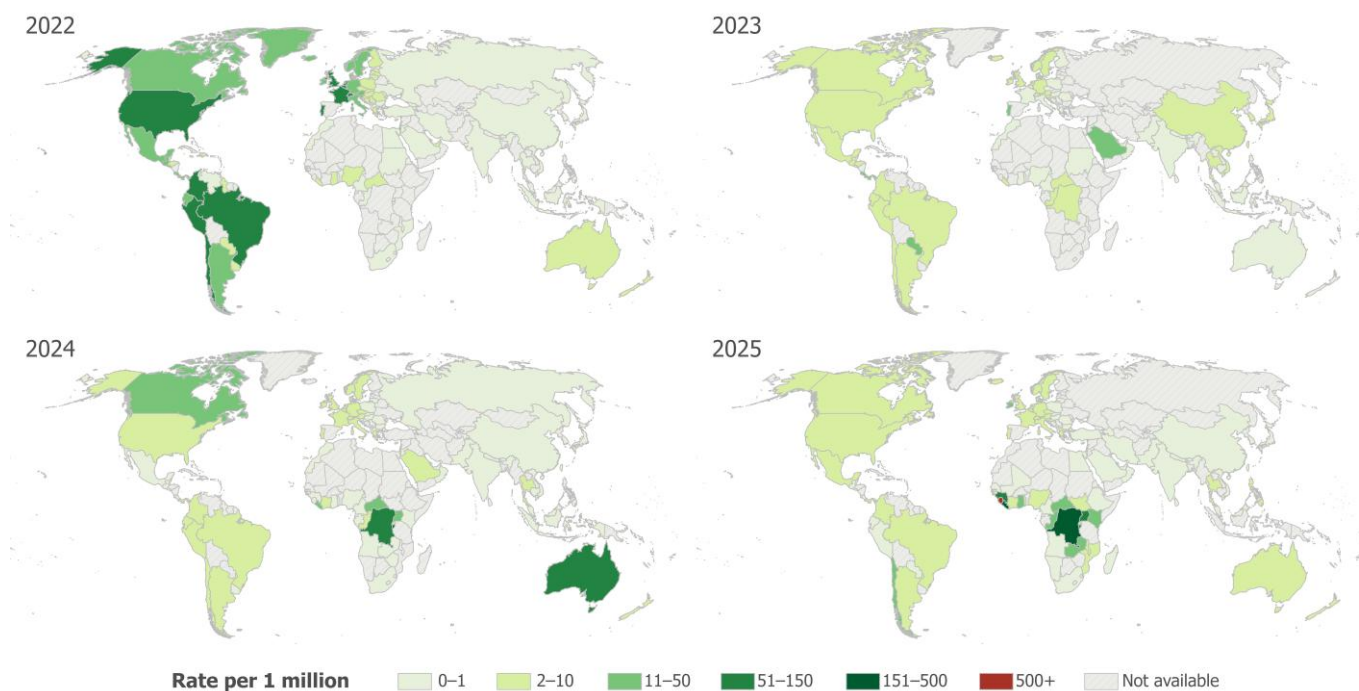
Source: WHO 2025b

## Mpox cases were confirmed in 98 countries in 2025

Mpox (formerly known as monkeypox) is a viral disease transmitted by contact with skin lesions, body fluids and respiratory droplets. Despite being endemic in Western and Central Africa since 1970, Mpox was a low priority disease until 2022, when an increase in global cases resulted in the WHO classifying it as a PHEIC in July of that year. While this status was lifted in May 2023, cases remained high in some African countries, particularly the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A surge of cases, including the emergence of a new strain, led the WHO to declare Mpox as a PHEIC again in August 2024. As of 2025, Mpox is still declared as a PHEIC with ongoing outbreaks primarily in Africa. For more information visit the [Health New Zealand website](#).

In 2025, 98 countries reported at least one case of Mpox (53,562 cases in total), compared to 109 countries in 2022 (84,502 cases in total), 76 countries in 2023 (9,666 cases in total) and 85 countries in 2024 (26,383 cases in total). The Democratic Republic of the Congo recorded 41% of all 2025 cases (21,820), followed by Uganda with 13% (7,093). There were 5.9 cases of Mpox per million people in 2025, increasing from 1.2 per million in 2023 and 3.0 per million in 2024. Countries with the highest rates of Mpox in 2025 included Sierra Leone (617.0 cases per million), Liberia (253.2 per million) and Democratic Republic of the Congo (193.4 per million) (Figure 3). New Zealand recorded 35 cases in 2025.

**Figure 3: Mpox notification rates, by country, 2022–2025**



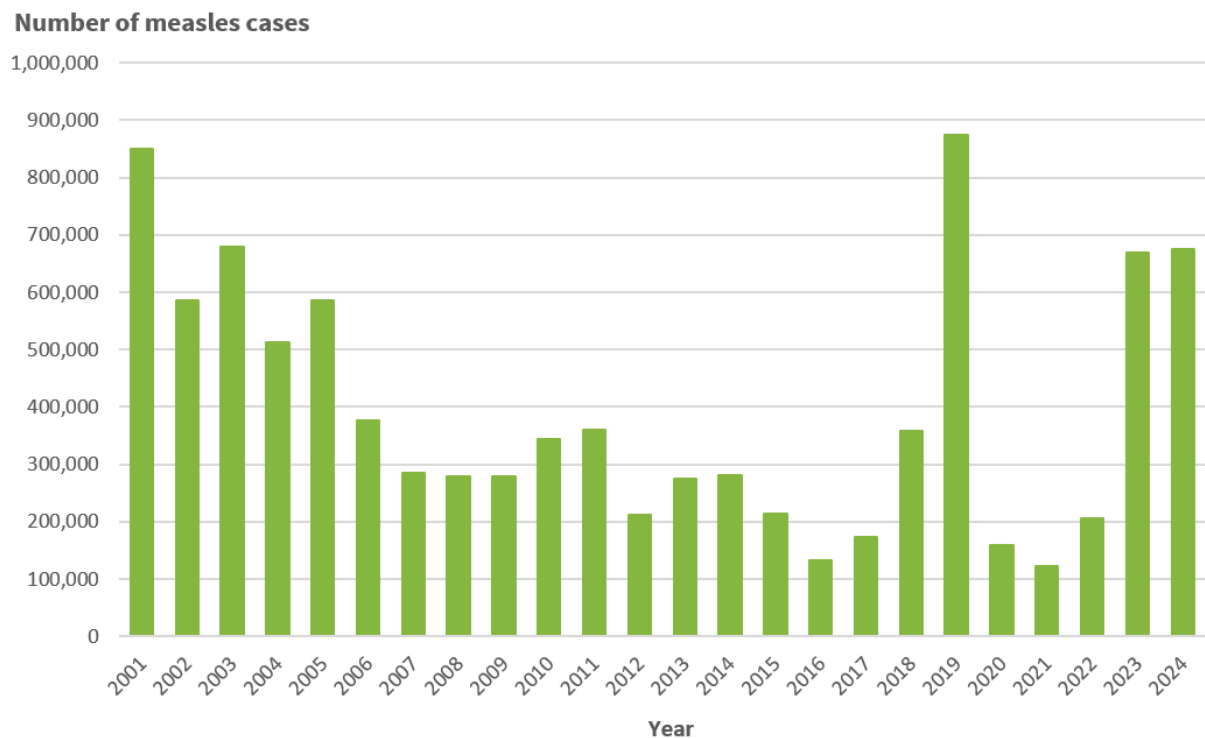
Source: WHO 2024c

## Measles cases increased steadily in 2023 and 2024

Measles is a highly contagious virus spread through droplets from the nose, throat or mouth and causes a fever, cough, and rash. For more information, visit the [Health New Zealand website](#).

Globally, measles cases reported to the WHO declined between 2000 and 2016 before increasing in 2017 and 2018 and spiking in 2019 (873,250 cases). Cases then declined during the first two years of the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020 (160,074 cases) and 2021 (123,185 cases) but increased again in 2022 (205,101 cases) and rose steadily to 669,091 cases in 2023 and 675,546 cases in 2024 (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Global measles notifications, 2000–2024**



Source: WHO 2026d

In 2023 and 2024, 82.7 and 82.8 cases of measles per million population were reported globally, impacting 131 and 137 countries, respectively. This is a rapid increase from 109 countries in 2022 (25.7 cases per million population), but it is lower than the peak in 2019, impacting 149 countries (111.8 cases per million population) (Table 1) (WHO 2024d). In 2019, New Zealand experienced the largest measles outbreak since 1997. A total of 2,189 cases were reported, the majority in Auckland, specifically in the Counties Manukau and Waitematā district health board areas (MOH 2020). In 2020, New Zealand reported seven cases, none from 2021 to 2023, likely due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, and 1 case in 2024, when the border reopened.

**Table 1: Reported measles cases and rate per million population, 2018–2024**

| Year | Total world cases reported to the WHO |                        | New Zealand cases reported to the WHO |                        |
|------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
|      | Cases                                 | Per million population | Cases                                 | Per million population |
| 2018 | 360,296                               | 46.6                   | 30                                    | 6.1                    |
| 2019 | 873,250                               | 111.8                  | 2,189                                 | 438.7                  |
| 2020 | 160,074                               | 20.3                   | 7                                     | 1.4                    |
| 2021 | 123,185                               | 15.5                   | 0                                     | 0                      |
| 2022 | 205,101                               | 25.7                   | 0                                     | 0                      |
| 2023 | 669,091                               | 82.7                   | 0                                     | 0                      |
| 2024 | 675,546                               | 82.8                   | 1                                     | 0.2                    |

Source: WHO 2024d

Measles vaccination rates below the needed level remain a threat to measles elimination goals (WHO 2024e). Vaccination coverage for the Western Pacific region, which includes New Zealand, was 92% in 2023, compared to 96% in 2019 (Minta 2023). In New Zealand itself, the percentage of children who received all age-appropriate vaccinations by two years of age (including the two vaccinations for measles) was only 80.9% as at 31 December 2025 (Health NZ 2026).

## Non-seasonal influenzas and MERS persist in parts of the world

There have been several other highly infectious respiratory diseases that have persisted across the globe in recent years. These include non-seasonal influenzas and Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Non-seasonal influenzas are defined as any novel influenza strain that may have pandemic potential. These include avian influenzas, such as H5N1, H3N8 and H10N3, and swine influenzas, such as H1N2 and H3N2.

In 2025, human cases of avian and swine influenzas were identified in three countries across two regions, which decreased from 11 countries in 2023 and 10 countries in 2024. All events were contained with sources identified and spread limited to one or two known human cases (Table 2).

**Table 2: Distribution of non-seasonal influenza cases by the WHO region and country, 2018–2025**

| WHO region                  | Country/<br>territory   | 2018    | 2019 | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    | 2024    | 2025    |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------|------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Americas                    | Brazil                  |         |      | present | present |         | present | present |         |
|                             | Chile                   |         |      |         |         |         | present |         |         |
|                             | Ecuador                 |         |      |         |         |         | present |         |         |
|                             | USA                     |         |      |         | present | present | present | present | present |
|                             | Mexico                  |         |      |         |         |         |         | present | present |
| Eastern<br>Mediterranean    | Oman                    |         |      |         |         |         | present |         |         |
|                             | Saudi Arabia            |         |      |         |         |         | present |         |         |
|                             | United Arab<br>Emirates |         |      |         |         |         | present |         |         |
| Europe                      | Germany                 |         |      |         |         | present |         |         |         |
|                             | Netherlands             |         |      |         |         |         | present |         |         |
|                             | Spain                   |         |      |         |         | present |         | present |         |
|                             | United Kingdom          |         |      |         |         | present | present |         |         |
| South-East Asia             | India                   |         |      |         | present |         |         | present |         |
| Western Pacific             | Cambodia                |         |      |         |         |         | present | present | present |
|                             | China                   | present |      |         | present | present | present | present |         |
|                             | Laos                    |         |      | present |         |         |         |         |         |
|                             | Vietnam                 |         |      |         |         |         |         | present |         |
|                             | Pitcairn Islands        |         |      |         |         | present |         |         |         |
|                             | Australia               |         |      |         |         |         |         | present |         |
| Africa                      | Ghana                   |         |      |         |         |         |         | present |         |
| Total countries/territories |                         | 1       | 0    | 2       | 4       | 6       | 11      | 10      | 3       |

Source: WHO 2026e

Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) is a lung disease caused by a coronavirus (MERS-CoV) with a high death rate that spreads to humans from camels and bats in the Eastern Mediterranean.

In 2025, MERS cases were identified in Saudi Arabia and France (Table 3). Cases in France involved individuals travelling to countries in the Arabian Peninsula. Since 2012, Saudi Arabia has reported 84% of MERS cases (WHO, 2025), posing a threat to other countries.

**Table 3: Distribution of MERS cases by the WHO region and country, 2018–2025**

| WHO region                  | Country/<br>territory   | 2018    | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    | 2024    | 2025    |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Eastern<br>Mediterranean    | Oman                    | present | present |         |         | present | present |         |         |
|                             | Qatar                   |         | present | present |         | present |         |         |         |
|                             | Saudi Arabia            | present | present | present | present | present | present | present | present |
|                             | United Arab<br>Emirates | present | present | present | present |         | present |         |         |
| Europe                      | United Kingdom          | present |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
|                             | France                  |         |         |         |         |         |         |         | present |
| South-East Asia             | South Korea             | present |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Western Pacific             | Malaysia                | present |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Total countries/territories |                         | 6       | 4       | 3       | 2       | 3       | 3       | 1       | 2       |

Source: WHO 2026e

## Laboratory confirmed dengue in Pacific Island countries increased in 2025

Dengue virus is an arboviral disease spread by mosquitoes, which can be separated into four serotypes (DEN-1, DEN-2, DEN-3 and DEN-4), all of which can cause severe illness in humans. Dengue is the most common arboviral disease found to enter New Zealand. It accounted for 357 cases of the 530 arboviral diseases entering New Zealand between 2019 and 2023, with the majority of these originating from the Pacific Islands (EHINZ 2025). The primary vectors of dengue, *Aedes albopictus* and *Aedes aegypti*, are not established in New Zealand, so local transmission is not currently possible (EHINZ 2023). Table 4 presents the Pacific Islands with laboratory-confirmed dengue from 2018 to 2025. The number of countries with confirmed cases peaked at 13 in 2019, decreased to two in 2022, and increased again in 2025 to 12 countries.

**Table 4: Pacific Island countries with confirmed Dengue Virus cases, 2018-2025**

| Country           | 2018    | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    | 2024    | 2025    |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| American Samoa    | present |         |         |         |         |         |         | present |
| Cook Islands      |         | present | present | present |         |         |         | present |
| Fiji              | present |         | present | present | present | present | present | present |
| French Polynesia  | present | present | present |         |         |         | present | present |
| Guam              |         | present |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Kiribati          | present | present |         |         |         |         |         | present |
| Marshall Islands  |         | present | present | present |         |         |         |         |
| Micronesia        |         | present | present |         |         |         |         | present |
| Nauru             |         | present |         |         |         |         |         | present |
| New Caledonia     | present | present |         |         |         |         |         | present |
| Niue              |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Palau             | present | present | present |         |         | present |         | present |
| Papua New Guinea  |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Samoa             | present |         |         |         |         |         | present | present |
| Solomon Islands   |         | present |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Tokelau           |         |         |         |         |         | present |         |         |
| Tonga             | present |         |         |         |         |         |         | present |
| Tuvalu            |         | present |         |         |         | present |         | present |
| Vanuatu           | present | present |         | present | present |         |         |         |
| Wallis and Futuna | present | present | present | present |         |         |         |         |

Notes: Countries with sporadic confirmed local cases (less than 10 cases) or confirmed imported cases only are excluded.

Source: Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network 2026

## Data for this indicator

Priority notifiable diseases are selected from ESR's annual notifiable disease list. The ESR changed its name to the New Zealand Institute for Public Health and Forensic Science (PHF Science) on July 1 2025.

All PHEICs, selected by WHO, are included as well as severe respiratory diseases. Information on vector-borne diseases is currently only investigated from a New Zealand context.

Data was obtained from the WHO website for all diseases except for the dengue virus, which was obtained by personal communication with the Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network.

For additional information, see the [Metadata](#) sheet.

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