

**Measles jabs saved nearly 20 mn lives in Africa since 2000: WHO, Gavi**  
Geneva, Switzerland

Increasing vaccine coverage has helped avert nearly 20 million measles-related deaths in Africa since 2000, according to a report published yesterday.

In their first-ever detailed analysis of immunisation targets on the continent, the World Health Organization and the Gavi vaccine alliance estimated that 19.5 million measles deaths had been averted in Africa between 2000 and the end of 2024.

And during the same timeframe, routine immunisation had protected more than 500 million children across Africa against a range of other deadly diseases, the report found.

"This analysis, highlighting 24 years of remarkable progress on the African continent, demonstrates the immense life-saving power of vaccines when immunisation is prioritised as a matter of policy," Gavi chief Sania Nishtar said in a joint statement.

Since the start of the century, 44 African countries have introduced into their routine immunisation programmes a second vaccine dose against measles -- one of the world's most contagious diseases.



Representative image

## World Bank announces water security plan covering one billion people

AFP | Washington, United States

The World Bank announced a plan yesterday that aims to improve secure water access for a billion people within the next four years.

The "Water Forward" program will "expand reliable water services and strengthen systems against droughts and floods."

The Bank said its own funds and technical advice would help improve water supplies to about 400 million people by 2030, with the balance coming from partners.

Water "determines whether people are healthy enough to work, whether children have a childhood to learn and to explore, and whether businesses can operate and economies can grow," World Bank President

Ajay Banga said.

The program will see countries identify areas of priority, then "development banks, governments, philanthropies, most importantly, the private sector as well, align behind that plan," he said.

The global lender did not specify how much funding it was committing to the initiative. Other participating institutions include regional development banks, OPEC's development fund, and the BRICS-aligned New Development Bank.

Fourteen countries had already voluntarily committed to reforming and strengthening their water sectors under the new program, the Bank said.

Some four billion people -- half the world's population -- face water scarcity, due in

part to "unclear policies, weak regulations, and financially unsustainable utilities that have slowed progress and deterred investment," the Bank said.

The focus on water governance issues -- not simply physical infrastructure -- is promising, said David Michel, senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"In many countries, the water sector fails to fully deploy the funds already allocated to it."

However, the Bank's initiative "faces a long and difficult road ahead," he warned, noting that countries with the greatest water insecurity often have the least capacity to reform.

The issue of access to safe drinking water has been highlighted during the war in the Middle East, with desalination plants in Iran and across the

region damaged in bombardments.

Beyond conflicts and immediate drinking water needs, the World Bank said better water security is needed to grow the global economy.

"Strong water systems are foundational to healthy economies that can attract private investment and create jobs," the Bank said.

### 400m

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## Trump says will fire Fed chair if he stays beyond mandate

AFP | Washington, United States

President Donald Trump renewed pressure yesterday on Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, with the US leader threatening to fire the central bank chief if he stays beyond his mandate.

Powell's term at the helm of the Fed ends in mid-May, and Trump has repeatedly lashed out at him for not cutting interest rates more aggressively.

"I'll have to fire him," Trump told Fox Business, if Powell "is not leaving on time."

The president added: "I've wanted to fire him."

The Trump administration has taken aim at the independent Fed on several levels, initiating an investigation into Powell over alleged renovation cost overruns at the Fed and seeking



Powell, Trump

to oust Fed governor Lisa Cook.

Asked if he would drop the Department of Justice probe involving Powell, Trump said: "I'm not playing. I have to find out."

Although Trump has named former central banker Kevin

Warsh to succeed Powell, he must be confirmed by the US Senate before taking up the role.

Warsh has a confirmation hearing before the Senate Banking Committee next Tuesday.

But his confirmation faces challenges with some lawmakers

criticizing the DOJ probe as political pressure on the central bank.

Senator Thom Tillis -- a member of Trump's Republican party who sits on the Senate Banking Committee -- has vowed to hold up the nomination as long as the investigation remains unresolved.

As long as Warsh's nomination process is stalled, Powell can legally remain in his role as Fed chairman.

Although it is not unheard of, it is rare for a Fed chair to remain on as a member of the board after their term as chief expires.

Powell first took the helm of the Fed during Trump's first presidency in 2018, and was reappointed to the position under Democrat Joe Biden in 2022.

## Azerbaijan, Russia reach deal over 2024 plane crash

AFP | Baku, Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan and Russia said yesterday they had reached a settlement over the deadly crash of an Azerbaijan Airlines jet, including compensation, that acknowledges the role of Russian air defences.

The announcement marks a significant step in easing tensions between the two countries after Baku accused Moscow of responsibility after the crash.

The AZAL Embraer 190 jet crash-landed in Kazakhstan in December 2024, killing 38 of the 67 people on board.

Baku's relations with Soviet-era master Russia soured after President Ilham Aliyev demanded that Moscow accept responsibility for mistakenly firing on the plane as it tried to make a scheduled landing at Grozny airport in south Russia.

On Wednesday, the two countries' foreign ministries said in a joint statement the crash resulted from the "unintentional action" of an air defence system in Russian airspace and confirmed agreement on compensation payments. It did not give details.

The agreement followed earlier talks between Aliyev and Russia's President Vladimir Putin, the statement said.



# French father who kept son in van faces 30 years in jail, says prosecutor

AFP | Mulhouse, France

A father who confined his child in a van for more than a year could face 30 years in jail, a French prosecutor said Wednesday, giving further details of his ordeal.

Officers opened the van last week to find the boy, now nine, lying in the foetal position, malnourished and no longer able to walk in the eastern village of Hagenbach.

A neighbour had sounded the alarm over sounds of a child coming from the vehicle in a shared courtyard.

The 43-year-old father, who has been remanded in custody, faces up to 30 years in jail on charges of confining the boy and depriving him of care, prosecutor Nicolas Heitz said.

He has admitted the charges and claimed he sought to



Police found the nine-year-old lying in the fetal position inside a van in the eastern village of Hagenbach

protect his son from his new partner who "wanted him to be admitted to a psychiatric ward".

The child has been taken to

hospital in the nearby city of Mulhouse.

The boy has told investigators he had a "very bad relationship

with his stepmother", describing her as "his worst enemy and as mean", Heitz said.

The boy claimed his father

had "no choice" other than to place him in the van in September 2024 as he did not want to go and stay with his mother, who has struggled with her mental health, the prosecutor said.

"His father would bring him water and food twice a day, usually cold meals," he added. He had a bundle of clothes and had to urinate into empty bottles.

His father regularly took out the trash. But the boy also said "that his dad no longer washed his clothes and that he no longer had pyjamas".

He slept on a mattress and no longer had a toothbrush. His toys were stored in a box in his room, the prosecutor said.

His 12-year-old sister, who stayed in the family home, reported that she "thought her brother had been committed" to a psychiatric hospital, the

prosecutor said.

She told investigators that his behaviour had changed after their father moved in with his new partner and her daughter, now 10. He had "become violent" and often insulted his stepmother.

The father's parents said the boy had become "difficult" and prone to "tantrums, having probably not coped well with his parents' separation" in 2022.

The mother said she had been treated at a psychiatric hospital between 2022 and 2024, then had last year been awarded the right to visit her children in the presence of a social worker, but had been unable to do so.

The stepmother faces up to seven years in jail, including for failing to help a child in danger, the prosecutor said. She has denied any wrongdoing.