

Fact Sheet: VACCINATION WEEK IN THE AMERICAS

Immunization in the Americas

The American Region (AMRO) of the WHO has made great progress in immunizing its population. Endemic measles has been eliminated in the Americas, with the last case reported in 2002. Polio was also eradicated in the AMRO Region in 1994, and the last case of endemic rubella in the Region was reported in 2009. Other diseases such as diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis have decreased significantly in incidence. Despite such successes in immunization, many children in the Region have not completed their vaccination schedules. In particular, populations living in urban fringes, low coverage municipalities, indigenous communities and rural and/or border zones, have lower vaccination rates in comparison to other populations, placing individuals living in these areas at heightened risk of contracting vaccine-preventable diseases.

Vaccination Week in the Americas

Originally launched in 2003, Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA) is an annual hemispheric event, endorsed by the Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization. VWA was initially proposed in 2002 by the Ministers of Health in the Andean Region following a measles outbreak in Venezuela and Colombia. Since its inception, over 288 million people of a variety of ages have been vaccinated against such illnesses as measles, rubella, polio, hepatitis B, influenza, diphtheria, and tetanus. Country and territory participation in VWA is flexible and goals and activities for the initiative are chosen in accordance with national health objectives. While some countries conduct large scale vaccination campaigns, others focus exclusively on communication initiatives and health promotion efforts. Many countries also use VWA as a platform for the integration of other preventative interventions with vaccination, such as the administration of vitamin A, folic acid, anti-parasite medication, and health education, among other activities. Annual regional and national multi-lingual VWA media campaigns serve to publicize the initiative to the general public. Each year, several Regional VWA launching events at bi-national or tri-national borders are also organized; such events have received increasing political priority and have counted on the attendance of presidents, ministers of health, and leaders of international organizations. The success of VWA has served as a model for other Regions of the World Health Organization (WHO); in 2005 the European Region (EURO) of WHO launched European Immunization Week (EIW) and in 2010 the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO) of the WHO will launch their first Vaccination Week (VWEM).

GOAL

Promote equity and access to immunizations, and Pan-Americanism.

Target Population

- Children under 5 years of age
- Pregnant women
- Elderly populations
- Border and isolated populations
- Indigenous populations
- Low coverage municipalities



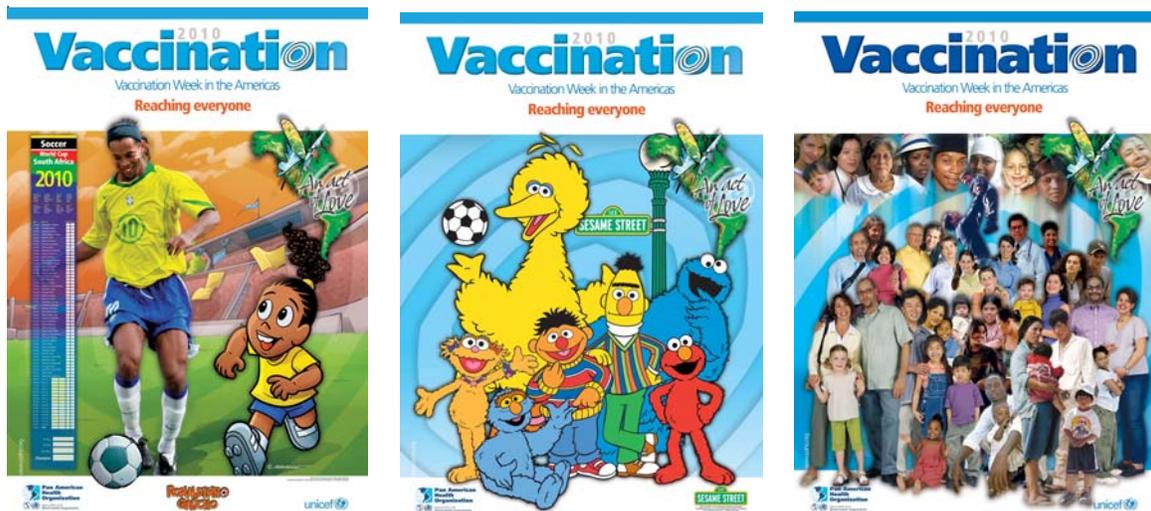
Partnership and Support

VWA is an initiative of the countries and territories of the Americas who plan and carry-out national VWA activities and document results. PAHO headquarters in Washington, DC provides support through technical and financial assistance during the initiative. Other key partners include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), The Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI), multiple NGOs, and local authorities, among many others.

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VWA 2010

Vaccination Week 2010 will take place from 24 April to 1 May 2010. All countries in the Region are expected to participate in a wide variety of activities. The Regional theme for 2010 is “Reaching everyone.” Promotional materials for VWA 2010 will also take advantage of the upcoming World Cup.



Examples of the English language posters to be distributed during VWA 2010

Regional VWA 2010 Launching Events

- Nicaragua
- Border of the United States and Mexico
- Border of Suriname and French Guiana (EURO), the first ever bi-Regional launch
- Border of Haiti and Dominican Republic (Minister of Health from Spain to be present at launch)

Key Country Activities

- Campaigns to strengthen the routine program and improve vaccination coverage rates
- Vaccination against pandemic influenza
- Vaccination of occupational risk groups
- Social communication campaigns