

Immunization in the Americas

The American Region (AMRO) of the World Health Organization (WHO) has made great progress in immunizing its population. Polio was eradicated in the AMRO Region in 1994, endemic measles has been eliminated, with the last indigenous case reported in 2002, and the last case of endemic rubella in the Americas was reported in 2009. The incidence of other vaccine-preventable diseases such as diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis has also decreased significantly. Despite such successes in immunization, many children in the Region have not completed their vaccination schedules. In particular, populations living in urban fringes, 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. From 2003-2011, as a result of activities conducted under the framework of VWA, more than 365 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, deworming treatment, and health education, among other activities. Annual region-wide and national multi-lingual VWA media campaigns also serve to publicize the initiative and the importance of vaccination to the general public. Each year, several Regional VWA launching events, often held 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.



OVERARCHING GOAL OF VWA

To promote equity and access to immunizations and cooperation between countries

Target Population

- Children under 5 years of age
- Pregnant women
- Elderly populations
- Indigenous populations
- Municipalities with low vaccination coverage

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 technical cooperation for the initiative and limited financial assistance. PAHO also designs and distributes VWA social communication materials annually. In 2008, a formal statement encouraging participation in VWA activities was signed by the Regional Directors of nine United Nations agencies and sent to their country representatives. Other key VWA partners include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECID), multiple NGOs, and local authorities, among many others.

VWA 2011

VWA 2011 was celebrated from 23-30 April under the slogan, “Vaccinate your family, protect your community”, to promote vaccination as a right of the entire family and as an essential tool in preventing many devastating diseases. This year, VWA was celebrated in 43 PAHO Member States and territories.

Multiple VWA launching events and celebrations of different magnitudes were celebrated this year in cities and towns, and on bi and tri-national borders. These events included Regional launching events between Peru and Bolivia on 26 April in Kasani, a community located at approximately 3,900 meters above sea level, and in Manaus, Brazil on 30 April. The event between Peru and Bolivia highlighted the health situation of communities living in the Altiplano, and the event in Manaus underscored the importance of vaccination in indigenous communities and other at-risk populations living in the Amazon Basin. Moreover, the Manaus event was an opportunity to celebrate the successes achieved in immunization and to strengthen cooperation between countries within the framework of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty.

Other VWA launching ceremonies took place between the United States and Mexico in Tucson, Arizona and in Panama, Guatemala, on the tri-national border between Colombia, Brazil and Peru, between Guatemala and Honduras, between Colombia and Ecuador, between Suriname and French Guyana, and in El Salvador, Costa Rica, Uruguay and in Cuba, among others.

For more information visit on VWA please visit: www.paho.org/vwa



Examples of the English language posters distributed during VWA 2011

Movement towards a World Immunization Week

The success of Vaccination Week in the Americas has served as a model for other Regions of the WHO in the implementation of successful sister initiatives.

In 2005, the **European Region (EURO)** of WHO launched European Immunization Week (EIW). In 2011, the sixth EIW promoted the message, “Shared solutions to common threats”, to highlight the importance of collaboration and sharing of experiences and lessons learned to keep vaccine-preventable diseases under control in the Region. A total of 52 countries participated in EIW 2011. The regional launch took place in Brussels on 26 April, hosted by Princess Mathilda of Belgium. Additionally, a sub-regional working group was established for 10 countries which focused on immunization issues relating to migrant and Roma populations.

In 2010, the **Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO)** of the WHO launched their first Vaccination Week (VWEM) with the participation of 100% of their Member States. This year, the Region’s second annual initiative adopted the theme of, “Partnership for immunization”, to promote the need to expand and formalize multi-sector collaboration as a means of maintaining immunization at the forefront of policy and decision makers’ agendas. The Regional Launching Ceremony took place on 21 April at the Regional WHO Office in Cairo, Egypt. 18 EMRO Member States participated in the initiative this year, despite the political instability in the Region at the time.

A delegation from the **African Region (AFRO)** of the WHO visited the Americas in 2010 to learn more about the planning and execution of VWA. AFRO launched the first annual African Vaccination Week (AVW) in 2011. The slogan for AVW is “Vaccinated communities, Healthy communities” and the theme for 2011 was “Put mothers and children first; vaccinate and stop polio now”. Thirty-nine countries participated in the inaugural AVW which was launched on 28 April in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In 2011, the **Western Pacific Region (WPRO)** also launched the First Vaccination Week in the Western Pacific on April 25 to coincide with the opening of a meeting for all representatives and focal points of WPRO countries in Manila. The Region’s inaugural initiative highlighted the importance and cost-effectiveness of immunization to prevent disease, disability and death for the individual, family and community. A total of 29 countries participated in this year’s inaugural initiative.

In September 2011, the countries of **South-East Asia (SEARO)** endorsed a resolution confirming their commitment to implement an annual regional immunization week in 2012.

In April 2012 all six WHO Regions will join together to celebrate a World Immunization Week.