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VACCINES AND IMMUNIZATION

This report of the Director reviews the progress achieved towards the goal of measles elimination in the Americas by the year 2000, control of neonatal tetanus, maintenance of poliomyelitis (SVI) eradication, and the efforts of the Special Program for Vaccines and Immunization to ensure regional self-sufficiency of vaccines used in national vaccination programs. Major advances have been achieved in the measles elimination initiative. Some countries in the Americas have also taken important steps to introduce new vaccines, such as hepatitis B, measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b, into their routine vaccination programs.

Recent measles outbreaks and the ongoing accumulation of susceptible persons over time should be a signal of the hurdles that need to be overcome to successfully complete the goal of measles elimination by the year 2000. Member States need to allocate the necessary financial resources to strengthen surveillance and laboratory testing of suspected measles cases, and they need to fully implement the PAHO-recommended measles vaccination strategy. These resources will also facilitate the incorporation of new vaccines into the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI). Emphasis also needs to be given to the declining attention to the four acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) surveillance indicators, which are used to detect possible circulation of poliovirus.

The availability of adequate resources and strong commitment by governments are equally critical in the area of vaccine development, production, and quality control, to upgrade and properly manage existing vaccine-producing laboratories and quality control institutions.

This report was reviewed and discussed at the 120th Session of the Executive Committee which adopted Resolution CE120.R18 (annexed) for consideration by the XL Directing Council. The Council is asked to review the report and consider the proposed resolution vis-à-vis the obstacles mentioned, and to make the recommendations it deems appropriate.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document outlines the major activities carried out by the Special Program for Vaccines and Immunization (SVI) during 1996 and the first quarter of 1997, particularly the progress toward the goal of measles elimination by the year 2000. Key areas of work included ensuring the quality of supervision and management of regional activities, improving the countries' laboratory diagnostic capabilities, and strengthening overall logistical aspects of surveillance.

The number of measles cases continues to decline every year in the Americas, and measles transmission remains absent in large geographic areas of the Region. PAHO's three-step vaccination strategy has effectively protected children in the 1-15 year age range. Although measles transmission is at an all-time low in the Americas, the virus continues to circulate widely in the rest of the world. The sources of the virus responsible for a recent measles outbreak in Brazil and another in Guadeloupe appear to be other regions of the world. Therefore, this factor, together with the accumulation of susceptible persons over time, continues to be the most serious obstacle to the elimination of the disease in the Region.

This document also updates the Executive Committee on the maintenance of the Region's polio-free status and on the progress achieved toward the elimination of neonatal tetanus as a public health problem.

Important advances are taking place in the Region's efforts to introduce new vaccines into routine immunization programs, such as *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib), yellow fever, hepatitis B and measles/mumps/rubella (MMR). Some countries have introduced the MMR vaccine, and the hepatitis B vaccine has been introduced in high-risk areas in Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela. Chile and Uruguay have already taken a major step in incorporating the Hib vaccine in their national vaccination programs.

During the period being reviewed, PAHO has also collaborated with the English-speaking Caribbean in determining the epidemiological impact of rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS). Emphasis is being placed on determining the critical elements for an effective strategy to control/eliminate rubella and CRS.

Finally, the report summarizes the Organization's efforts towards ensuring Regional self-sufficiency in vaccines used in routine vaccination programs, in strengthening the capacity of countries to assure that children receive safe and efficacious vaccines, and in securing the successful implementation of future initiatives for the control and eradication of vaccine-preventable diseases.

The discussions of the 120th Session of the Executive Committee highlighted the fact that national immunization programs have been very successful due to the high level of political commitment of governments and allocation of necessary resources. Other

important factors mentioned were the clear objectives and targets of the Program as well as the intense social mobilization and interagency collaboration. Finally, the continuous technical support and follow up by PAHO's Secretariat was mentioned as an important factor in the success of the national programs.

The Executive Committee highlighted the importance that the introduction of new vaccines will have in terms of future disease prevention, noting that a major challenge in this respect is the higher cost that these new vaccines will necessarily have. In this respect, the Committee stressed the importance of alliances for the production of vaccines and the role that PAHO can play with mechanisms of joint purchase, such as the Revolving Fund for the purchase of vaccines.

The resolution proposed by the Executive Committee for the consideration of the XL Directing Council calls for the countries to allocate the necessary resources to support the immunization programs, with mobilization of resources from public and private sectors and strengthened inter-agency coordination. It calls for improved surveillance for vaccine-preventable diseases and introduction of new, available vaccines as soon as possible, based on analysis of disease burden. Furthermore, it calls on Member States to provide resources and participate actively in research and development of vaccines of regional importance and to strengthen quality control activities. Finally, it calls on the Director to continue his efforts to secure funds for the implementation of the Plan of Action for Measles Elimination in the Americas by the year 2000, to coordinate the research, development, production and quality control of vaccines and to promote actions that aim at making the highest quality vaccines accessible and affordable to all peoples of the Region.

TO CONSULT THE COMPLETE DOCUMENT YOU MAY CLICK HERE ON DOC. NO. 138, CE120/20, presented to the 120th Executive Committee.

ANNEX: CE120.R18

VACCINES AND IMMUNIZATION

THE 120th MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE,

Having examined the report on vaccines and immunization (Document CE120/20),

RESOLVES:

To recommend to the Directing Council the adoption of a resolution along the following lines:

THE XL MEETING OF THE DIRECTING COUNCIL,

Having examined the report of the Director (Document CD40/22) on the progress made by the Special Program for Vaccines and Immunization and on the regional initiative calling for the elimination of measles in the Americas by the year 2000;

Recognizing the continued commitment of Member States to assigning high priority to immunization programs and their efforts to introduce new vaccines into the national vaccination schedule;

Noting with satisfaction that Member States who have followed PAHO's recommended three-step vaccination strategy against measles are effectively protecting children in the 1-15-year age range, but expressing concern that despite these advances the virus is still circulating in some parts of the Region and is affecting susceptible populations;

Concerned about the declining attention to the four acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) surveillance indicators, which are used to detect possible circulation of poliovirus;

Recognizing that the effectiveness of immunization strategies depend on the utilization of vaccines of assured quality; and

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Recognizing the tremendous advances in vaccine research and development worldwide that will lead to important new vaccines,

RESOLVES:

1. To urge Member States to:
 - (a) allocate the necessary financial and human resources to support routine immunization programs in the Region;
 - (b) maintain the Region of the Americas polio free, with appropriate surveillance of acute flaccid paralysis;
 - (c) consider the changes in the epidemiology of measles, review their current vaccination strategies for measles accordingly, and determine the need for a follow-up campaign among all children 1-4 years of age;
 - (d) coordinate the mobilization of resources from the public and private sectors in support of overall immunization programs, through inter-agency coordinating committees;
 - (e) strengthen the vaccine quality control system at the national and regional level, through the continued support of the Regional Network of Vaccine Quality Control Laboratories and national control authorities;
 - (f) organize national advisory groups for vaccines and immunization to strengthen and/or coordinate activities of all institutions and laboratories involved in vaccine research, development, production and quality control;
 - (g) strengthen surveillance in preparation for the introduction of new vaccines (such as *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib), hepatitis B, and measles/mumps/rubella (MMR)), to accurately determine disease burden and develop appropriate vaccination strategy;
 - (h) provide resources and participate actively in vaccine research and development, in order to facilitate the availability of new vaccines of regional importance.
2. Request the Director to:
 - (a) continue his efforts to secure funds for the implementation of the Plan of Action for Measles Elimination in the Americas by the year 2000;

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- (b) coordinate activities related to research, development, production, and quality control of vaccines in the Region;
- (c) promote actions by the Organization and the countries to make the highest quality vaccines accessible to their peoples at the lowest possible cost.

*(Adopted at the seventh plenary session,
26 June 1997)*