



## Regional Certification Commission for the Polio Endgame in the Region of the Americas (RCC) Invites Countries to Increase their Efforts to Advance towards Global Certification

*Ana Elena Chevez, Gloria Rey-Benito, Andrea Villalobos, Paola Ojeda, Elizabeth Thrush, PAHO*

The Regional Certification Commission for the Polio Endgame in the Region of the Americas (RCC) held its 10th meeting from 23-26 October in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. The RCC members that attended this meeting were: Dr. Arlene King, President; Dr. José Luis Díaz-Ortega; Dr. José Félix Sánchez Largaespada; Dr. Mark Pallansch; and Dr. Angela Gentile. The other two RCC members, Dr. Rosa Alba Salas and Dr. Eliseu Waldman, participated during some sessions via teleconference.



RCC Members at their 10th annual meeting.  
Credit: Eduardo Rivero.

During this meeting, the RCC reviewed the updated progress reports on poliovirus containment, annual reports on polio eradication status, and the methodology and results from the regional risk assessment tool proposed by the Secretariat. Additionally, the RCC held two meetings with the Ministries of Health and Chairs of the National Certification Commissions of the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

One of the aspects that demanded special attention from the Commission was analyzing the methodological design of the risk assessment tool that was used to classify countries as high, medium or low risk of polio and their conceptual consistency with the definition of risk, established by the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for Vaccine-preventable Diseases in 2011. The RCC congratulated PAHO Member States for submitting the updated containment reports, and for the first time in many years, annual reports on the state of polio eradication in their countries.

Regarding poliovirus containment, the RCC recognizes advances from the countries with the implementation of the Regional-GAPIII, as well as guidance on minimizing the risk for facilities collecting, handling or storing potentially infectious poliovirus materials; efforts should however continue to finalize Phase I and advance with the process of containment certification.

Additional recommendations that came from this meeting include the need to update the polio field guide, the importance of countries increasing their efforts to strengthen the knowledge of health personnel regarding detecting, classifying and reporting AFP cases; and, finally, the importance of conducting risk assessment at subnational levels.



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## Grenada Gets Ready to Introduce the HPV Vaccine

*Kathy-Ann George Swan, Community Health Nurse, Ministry of Health, Social Security and International Business, Government of Grenada*

<b>Location</b>	Ministerial Complex, St. George's, Grenada
<b>Dates</b>	10 September 2018
<b>Participants</b>	Ten private and public media houses throughout Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique (including radio, newspaper, television and online digital news media). The objectives of the workshop were to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise awareness on the global/local situation of cervical cancer and cancers in general; discuss the main types of human papillomavirus (HPV) that are known to cause cervical cancer and the role of media in promoting the vaccine as cancer-preventive;</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop partnership and collaboration with media and the Ministry of Health to motivate parents/caregivers, girls and other target audiences to accept the vaccine;</li> <li>• Provide scientific information to dispel myths and rumors about the vaccine, as well as general information on the HPV vaccine and the planned introduction into the Expanded Program on Immunization in Grenada.</li> </ul>

The Ministry of Health, Social Security and International Business facilitated a sensitization workshop for media houses to inform and educate media personnel on the cervical cancer strengthening project. This project involves introducing the HPV vaccine as primary prevention to reduce the incidence and prevalence of cervical cancer, which had a mortality rate of 16.7 % during 2000-2010, almost twice the WHO estimated rate for the Region.

Adapting experiences from other countries that introduced the HPV vaccine and negative reviews that resulted in low uptake of the vaccine, the purpose was to ensure that Grenada does not suffer the same fate.

The media is one of the most influential platforms in the tri-island state (Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique), hence as a key stakeholder it was imperative that the media was adequately informed.

Introduction of the HPV vaccine is scheduled for November 2018 utilizing a school-based approach with an official launch of the program in October 2018.

Technical presentations were followed by a question and answer segment, where many of the frequently asked questions were addressed.



Dr. Darlene Omari Taylor, (PAHO's Family and Community Health Advisor) addressing media participants on the rationale for administering the vaccine at the recommended age. Credit: Ministry of Health, Grenada.



Hon. Nicholas Steele, Minister of Health, Social Security and International Business, addressing participants on the importance of having a national HPV immunization program together with an effective program with regular checkups for women, with Pauline



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This allowed the media personnel the opportunity to address their concerns and those of the public so that they would be better informed to share the knowledge with the public.

Having been sensitized, the media now acts as one of the Ministry of Health’s key partners in helping to dispel myths and reporting positive messages about the strengthening of the cervical cancer prevention program with the HPV vaccine.



Media participants at the HPV introduction workshop in Grenada.  
Credit: Ministry of Health, Grenada.

## Workshop on Data Analysis with Information from Electronic Immunization Registries (EIRs)

*Robin Mowson, Marcela Contreras, Martha Velandia, and Daniel Otzoy García, PAHO*

<b>Location</b>	Mexico City, Mexico
<b>Dates</b>	12-13 September 2018
<b>Participants</b>	Nineteen participants representing the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) from six countries who have already implemented EIRs or are in the process of implementation and improvement (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Honduras, Mexico, and Uruguay), as well as representatives from PATH and PAHO/WHO. The main objective of the workshop was to learn good practices from countries in relation to monitoring and evaluating vaccination indicators from the EPIs using information coming from EIRs. Another objective was to establish and document a catalogue of analyses and indicators that respond to the performance monitoring needs of the country EPIs using information coming from the EIRs. Specific objectives included:
<b>Purpose</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Generating a methodological document related to the different analyses that countries are developing and that could be developed in the future;</li> <li>2. Reviewing different experiences from the countries and generating a variety of analyses that can be extended to other countries of the Americas Region.</li> <li>3. Incorporating results from this workshop into a document of practical considerations for a nominal immunization registry system developed by PAHO.</li> </ol>

At the end of the workshop, next steps were defined for the development of a document on analysis and data quality that can be added to the existing guide. Overall, the workshop was very productive, and the discussion sessions generated rich brainstorming. PAHO plans to continue the discussion with countries on the dimensions analyzed during the workshop, including:

- EIR users
- Traditional and non-traditional reports and indicators in an EIR
- Indicators of an EIR implementation
- Data quality indicators in an EIR
- Alternative and innovative analyses



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Due to the success of this workshop and the quality of the gathered information, it is proposed to continue convening meetings with a small group of participants who have the necessary experience on the topics under discussion.

The opportunity for future sessions hosted by PAHO was discussed and is considered a good next step to discuss any or all the following topics, which were raised by the group: Discussion on the use of EIRs in vaccination campaigns; construction of indicators; new studies or other potential analyses to be performed with an EIR.



Participants from the workshop on data analysis with EIRs. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

## Caribbean Health Officers are Ready to Respond Quickly to an Imported Measles Outbreak

*Karen Lewis-Bell; Desiree Pastor and Pamela Bravo, PAHO*

During 1-3 October 2018, a total of 35 health officers from the fields of immunization and epidemiology in 25 Caribbean islands and territories were trained in the preparedness of a rapid response to imported cases of measles and rubella.

Following a newly developed methodology and case study by PAHO's Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit, health officers learned to implement procedures and methods for the timely reporting and high-quality epidemiological investigation of a measles outbreak; implement aggressive outbreak response measures guided by a thorough field investigation; differentiate the diagnosis of measles and rubella from arboviral diseases (e.g. Zika, dengue and Chikungunya); and interpret laboratory results for an adequate diagnostic confirmation.



Participants from the training on rapid responses to measles outbreaks in the Caribbean, held in Jamaica, October 2018. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

Working as members of a rapid response team, health officers were assigned to the investigation and control of a measles outbreak, in the context of an arbovirus outbreak (Zika) and mass gathering event (sporting event), which posed critical challenges to organize the investigation and response to prevent further spread of the virus. At the end of the case study, the rapid response teams were immersed in a simulation exercise, aimed to put the recently acquired knowledge and skills into practice to respond quickly to an outbreak resulting from an imported case and conduct an organized response.



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The case study concluded with a simulation exercise that re-created two hypothetical measles outbreak situations, one involving an international traveler and another in a public hospital. The simulation was aimed at helping participants learn how to organize as a rapid response team, conduct an epidemiological investigation of the outbreak, analyze and interpret investigation findings, and plan a rapid response to the outbreak.

Participants indicated that the training including the case study and simulation exercise was timely and quite effective in preparing them to manage an outbreak should there be an importation.

## Celebration of World Polio Day in the Dominican Republic: “Protect Children, Take Action!”

*Zacarias Garib, Director of the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI); Yenny Rocio Neira, Comprehensive Family Immunization, PAHO; Gabriela Rodriguez, Communications, PAHO*

<b>Location</b>	Dominican Republic
<b>Dates</b>	24 October 2018
<b>Participants</b>	Participants included representatives from the Dominican Republic’s Ministry of Health; PAHO/WHO; Dominican Rehabilitation Association; Regional Commission for the Certification of the Final Phase of the Eradication of Polio (RCC); Rotary International.
<b>Purpose</b>	Celebrate World Polio Day in the Region of the Americas

The Dominican Republic led the celebration of World Polio Day in the Region of the Americas with a special event organized by the EPI, under coordination by the Ministry of Health and with support from PAHO/WHO.

The ceremony was held at the School of Special Education of the Asociación de Rehabilitación Dominicana-ADR (Dominican Rehabilitation Association), and was presided by the Minister of Health, Dr. Rafael Sánchez Cárdenas, accompanied by PAHO/WHO Representative (PWR), Dr. Alma Morales; President of the Regional Certification Commission for the Final Phase of Polio Eradication, Dr. Arlene King and Dr. Jaqueline Medina from Rotary International.



World Polio Day celebration, 24 October 2018, Dominican Republic. Credit: Ministry of Health and PAHO/WHO.



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During his speech, Dr. Sánchez Cárdenas indicated that the mission of health authorities is to eradicate the disease and not allow one more child to die of polio. He proceeded to explain that just one case of polio, registered in any country in the world, is enough to keep us alert and continue to fight against this disease that has caused so much damage upon humanity. He also stated that the Ministry will continue to support all strategic plans that strengthen vaccination coverage, in addition to maintaining a strict epidemiological surveillance.



World Polio Day celebration, 24 October 2018, Dominican Republic.  
Credit: Ministry of Health and PAHO/WHO.

Dr. Alma Morales, PWR in the Dominican Republic, stated: "If we intensify efforts, maintain commitment and take action, very soon polio will be the first disease to be eradicated in the 21st century." She also specified that the last polio case in the Dominican Republic was registered in the year 1985, six years before the last case was recorded in the Region of the Americas, which happened in Peru in 1991.

Finally, Dr. Arlene King, President of the RCC, recalled that "the difficult experience of the Dominican Republic in the years 2000 and 2001, is a lesson learned that should not be forgotten. Cases of poliovirus derived from the vaccine should be a constant reminder and a motivation to overcome low coverage, avoid complacency and set increasingly ambitious goals. Dominican children, children of the Americas and children of the world deserve the opportunity to grow up in a polio free world."



World Polio Day celebration, 24 October 2018, Dominican Republic.  
Credit: Ministry of Health and PAHO/WHO.

During the ceremony, the Minister and doctors Juan Santoni Mendoza, researcher in the field of polio, and Zacarias Garib, director of the EPI, were recognized along with Rotary International for their contributions to local eradication programs.

In addition to this special event, the World Polio Day celebration in the Americas was accompanied by a video message from Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, PAHO's Assistant Director, social media post cards and messages, and multiple activities organized by partners throughout the continent.



## Haiti Prepares for Polio and Measles Campaign

*Paule-Andrée Byron, National Immunization Program; Edmond Gue, Ana Elena Chevez, Desiree Pastor, Pamela Bravo, Jennifer Sanwogou, Eduardo Rivero, PAHO*

To maintain its status as a measles and polio-free country and avoid the risk of their potential reintroduction, the Haitian Ministry of Health, through its National Immunization Program, with support from PAHO/WHO, initiated the planning process for an integrated vaccination campaign, planned to begin during Vaccination Week in the Americas in April 2019.



Haiti team plans for 2019 measles and bOPV campaign.  
Credit: Eduardo Rivero

The campaign will aim to conduct an integrated supplemental immunization activity with the measles/rubella and bivalent oral polio vaccine (bOPV) vaccines, reaching more than 1.5 million children, whom will also receive a dose of vitamin A. To achieve this goal, the country plans to mobilize 2,339 vaccination teams that will be deployed throughout the country.

National authorities expressed their concern regarding the current low vaccination coverage in country, and the risks associated with circulation of the measles virus in some countries of the Region of the Americas. For this reason, national authorities, together with PAHO colleagues from the Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit and the Revolving Fund for Vaccine Procurement, began discussions aiming to guarantee technical and financial viability for the campaign.

The immediate tasks that must be carried out include:

- a) consolidation of the campaign budget,
- b) resource mobilization to diminish the financial gaps,
- c) development of technical tools, and
- d) coordination with the national and international institutions for their involvement.

Dr. Paule-Andrée Byron, coordinator of the National Immunization Program in Haiti, together with representatives from the Epidemiology and Laboratories Directorate, expressed their intention to take the necessary steps to achieve a quality campaign.

Currently, Haiti is facing a diphtheria epidemic and authorities have expressed their wish to avoid new outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.



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## Immunization Workshop for Health Journalists: "Strengthening Alliances with Media"

Zacarias Garib, Antolina Rodriguez, Franklin Castillo, Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI); Yenny Rocio Neira, Gabriela Rodriguez, PAHO

<b>Location</b>	Dominican Republic
<b>Dates</b>	June-October 2018
<b>Participants</b>	Representatives from the Dominican Republic's Ministry of Health, PAHO/WHO, The Circle of Journalists covering Health (CIPESA, per its acronym in Spanish), Journalists-Barahona, Santo Domingo, La Romana, Santiago.
<b>Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen health journalist knowledge on vaccines and their impact on the health and well-being of the population.</li> <li>• Establish alliances with media to increase population knowledge of vaccination and encourage demand for vaccination posts in the country.</li> </ul>

The Dominican Republic's EPI, The Circle of Health Journalists (CIPESA), with support from PAHO/WHO, carried out four immunization workshops during the second semester of 2018 aimed at strengthening the knowledge of journalists, with an emphasis on those who cover health issues. The workshops have been held in four provinces of the country.

These workshops address issues such as the importance of vaccines and their inclusion in the basic immunization scheme, media responsibility when developing messages aimed at the population, potentially affecting the percentage of coverage in a country and instigate a positive or negative result. Additionally, journalists were urged to use scientific sources to validate their reports, reports and news.

On behalf of PAHO/WHO, the local immunization advisor, Dr. Yenny Neira, highlighted the advances in immunization within the Region of the Americas and mentioned the current challenges affecting vaccination coverage, with all biologicals and at all levels. The importance of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, which was introduced in the country in 2017, was also mentioned.

This initiative aims to stimulate awareness of the importance of immunization and the accuracy of facts received by communication professionals, who through their work can provide timely information to the public, especially in times of crisis.

During this training session, the following areas were also addressed: global and regional impact of the EPI, the history of vaccines and their background, as well as the correct



Participants in the workshop for health journalists, Dominican Republic, June-October 2018. Credit: Ministry of Health and PAHO/WHO.



Participants in the workshop for health journalists, Dominican Republic, June-October 2018. Credit: Ministry of Health and PAHO/WHO



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communication approach for issues related to this topic.

The first of these workshops was held in the city of Santo Domingo and has since expanded to other parts of the country, after a spark of interest from journalists across the Dominican Republic. Thus far, over 130 journalists have participated in this initiative.



Participants in the workshop for health journalists, Dominican Republic, June-October 2018.  
Credit: Ministry of Health and PAHO/WHO.