

World Polio Day in the Americas: We Won't Stop until It's Done

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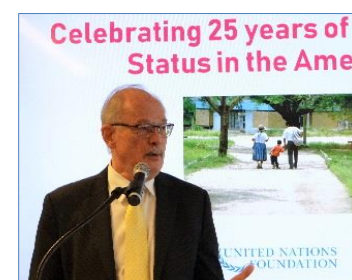
The United Nations Foundation (UNF) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) held a celebration at UNF on 21 October, to celebrate World Polio Day and simultaneously, honor the 25th anniversary of the certification of the Americas as polio-free. Public health professionals, immunization experts and representatives of various partners – who for decades contributed to the fight against this disease – participated in the event.

UNF's Deputy CEO, Ambassador Elizabeth Cousens, opened the ceremony, congratulating PAHO and all the countries of the Americas for maintaining polio-free status for more than a quarter of a century and stated: "The UN Foundation is proud to work with all partners to support the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. We will continue to advocate for the polio resources needed until the job is done, and no child will ever have to fear polio again."



Amb. Elizabeth Cousens, UNF.
Credit: UNF.

Ambassador John Lange, Senior Fellow at UNF, recalled, "This success has been led by the five core partners –WHO, UNICEF, CDC, BMGF, and Rotary International – along with governments from donor and affected countries, other civil society organizations, and many others." In another part of his speech he stressed that polio eradication was one of the first priorities of the UN Foundation, stating "UNF made its first grant to GPEI in 1999 and is proud to have been a founder of the Polio Advocacy Group in the year 2000."



Amb. John Lange, UNF.
Credit: UNF.

Dr. Ana Elena Chavez, PAHO regional advisor and leader of the polio program in the Region, recapitulated the process that PAHO Member States followed to achieve and maintain polio elimination in the Region for almost 30 years and recalled, "As long as there is still one case of polio in the world, the risk persists, so it is necessary that the Americas, amidst this celebration of accomplishment, does not become complacent." She concluded, "We are proud of these 25 years, but we won't stop until it's done. We won't stop until every child, in every corner of the world, can live in a polio-free world."



Dr. Ana Elena Chávez, PAHO.
Credit: UNF.



In his speech on behalf of Rotary International, Mr. Mike McGovern, referred to the achievements and the challenges that remain:

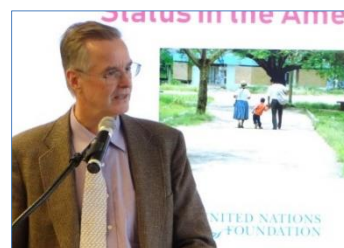
“Everyone is working to get this done. We had a few setbacks, but I'm still confident we are going to get this done[...]. We are going to make sure that we not only eradicate polio, but that we sustain a polio free world.”

To conclude the ceremony, Dr. Jon Andrus, former Deputy Director of PAHO and professor at the Colorado School of Public Health, recalled the great figures of eradication and said, “These heroes left us a legacy of leadership that went well beyond the success of polio eradication. However, I want to make it clear that the real heroes are the women and men who work day-to-day in the field, at the point of service, who provide the necessary actions to eradicate polio, but also strengthen other essential immunization services.”

In the Region of the Americas, 9 out of 10 children receive the first dose of the polio vaccine, however, only 87% complete the third dose. According to PAHO estimates, around 4 million children in the Region live in municipalities with medium and high risk of polio.



Mike McGovern, Rotary.
Credit: UNF.



Dr. Jon Andrus.
Credit: UNF.

Workshop on the Use of Surveillance and Coverage Data for Evidence-based Decision-making and Planning for Sustaining Measles and Rubella Elimination

Pamela Bravo, Karen Lewis-Bell, Everton Kidd and Claudia Ortiz, PAHO

Location	Grenada
Dates	22-24 October 2019
Participants	Immunization and surveillance managers of the following seven English-speaking Caribbean countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis and St. Lucia.
Purpose	Immunization and surveillance Managers from seven English-speaking Caribbean countries were convened to perform a risk assessment analysis for measles virus transmission at the district level, using their surveillance and vaccination coverage data as well as other variables that may increase the risk of virus importation and transmission, such as high influx of tourists. The assessment was implemented following the WHO tool that was recently adapted for PAHO.

The use of the PAHO-adapted risk assessment tool enabled countries to conduct an analysis of their risk for measles and use the information generated to develop plans of action to sustain elimination of measles and rubella in 2020.

Overall, the results showcased the need for complete and accurate coverage and surveillance data, as well as the importance of enforcing surveillance activities through the implementation of active case finding especially in the context of on-going arbovirus infections, such as dengue fever, which also presents with fever and a rash. The importance of performing an analysis of population immunity by cohorts at the district level, to more accurately determine the susceptible population in need of supplementary vaccination activities was also appreciated. This is especially important since the Caribbean countries do not conduct follow-up campaigns but administer and record individual delayed doses with the MMR vaccine every month at the health facility level, given their small target population size. Thus, population immunity levels may be higher than the reported annual routine coverage during the last five years.



Participants at workshop on data use for measles and rubella elimination, Grenada, October 2019.
Credit: PAHO/WHO



Participants at workshop on data use for measles and rubella elimination, Grenada, October 2019.
Credit: PAHO/WHO

The use of the tool by the workshop participants provided valuable feedback to improve and release the final version of the tool, including the country report template and user guide.

Second Meeting of Experts to Review the Regional Guide on ESAVI Surveillance

Desiree Pastor, Pamela Bravo, PAHO-Washington, DC

Location	Santiago, Chile
Dates	7-8 October 2019
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country representatives with expertise on ESAVI surveillance from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru and the United States. PAHO/WHO officials, CDC officials Experts on the topics of immunization, pharmacovigilance, clinical, signal detecting and social communication.
Purpose	Generate final recommendations to develop and implement the Regional Guide on ESAVI Surveillance in the Americas

Experts in the surveillance of events supposedly attributable to vaccination or immunization (ESAVIs) were convened by PAHO/WHO to review the second version of the Regional Guide on ESAVI Surveillance in the Americas. This activity is a follow-up to the commitments made during the first meeting of experts, which took place in Bogotá in March 2019.

The regional manual is based on the WHO global manual published in 2014, evidence from reviews of the scientific literature and results from visits to specific countries (Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico), where in-depth interviews were conducted with experts, focusing also on identifying and understanding the flow of reporting and research of an ESAVI from the local to national levels.



Participants of the Second Meeting of Experts to Review the Regional Guide on ESAVI Surveillance in Santiago, Chile. Credit: PAHO/WHO.

The proposed methodology focused on the comprehensive review of key chapters of the manual, such as: *Principles and Models for ESAVI Surveillance*; *Considerations for the Implementation of ESAVI Surveillance at the National Level*; *ESAVI Identification and Reporting*, *ESAVI Research*, *Causality Analysis and Final Classification of ESAVI and Risk Communication*. Using a review guide, participants were oriented to review specific sections of the chapters mentioned above, and the feedback received was discussed in plenary.

National Workshop to Prepare Rapid Responses to Imported Cases of Measles, Rubella and Congenital Rubella Syndrome

Dr. Jazmina Umaña, Ministry of Health-Nicaragua

Location	Managua, Nicaragua
Dates	18-20 September 2019
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personnel from Nicaragua's Expanded Program on Immunization for the country's departments and municipalities, as well as from departmental surveillance. • Interim PAHO/WHO Representative in Nicaragua, Dr. Celia Riera, and General Director of Public Health Surveillance of the Ministry of Health, Dr. Martha Reyes.
Purpose	Strengthen national and departmental capacities to rapidly respond to imported measles and rubella cases

Nicaragua has not had any cases of measles and rubella since 1995 and 2004, respectively, and no cases of congenital rubella syndrome since 2005.

Analyzing the current epidemiological situation of measles in the Region of the Americas and the world, where measles outbreaks have occurred, the country has decided with help from international experts and PAHO/WHO, to train local teams in preventive actions that allow a timely and effective response to the possibility of imported measles cases, as established by the Regional Monitoring and Re-verification Commission (RVC) for Measles and Rubella Elimination.



Participants at workshop on rapid responses to imported cases of measles, rubella, and congenital rubella syndrome, September 2019.
Credit: Ministry of Health-Nicaragua.

It is important to highlight the high commitment from participants in the workshop which will be replicated in the 19 Local Integrated Health Care Systems (in Spanish, Sistemas Locales de Atención Integral en Salud — SILAIS) of the country.