
SESIÓN DE PRENSA

SEMANA DE VACUNACIÓN EN LAS AMÉRICAS

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Como fueron preparadas para su presentación

Muy buenos días a todos.

La Región de las Américas se ha posicionado como líder mundial en inmunización. Somos la primera región en haber eliminado la polio, la rubéola y el síndrome de rubéola congénita, y somos la única región que ha recuperado y mejorado sus coberturas de vacunación a niveles previos a la pandemia.

Estos logros han tenido un impacto profundo en la vida de las personas. Entre 1974 y 2024, la vacunación infantil en las Américas ha evitado aproximadamente 15 millones de muertes en niños menores de 5 años, más de 1.100 millones de casos de discapacidad y cerca de 28.400 millones de casos de enfermedad.

Pero aún quedan brechas importantes que debemos cerrar.

La Semana de Vacunación en las Américas, que celebraremos del 25 de abril al 2 de mayo desde Canadá hasta Argentina, es una oportunidad clave para redoblar esfuerzos y cerrar esas brechas.

Por primera vez, el lanzamiento regional se realizará en Ottawa, Canadá, el 27 de abril. Agradezco al Gobierno de Canadá por acoger este evento en un momento tan significativo.

Desde 2002, esta iniciativa ha permitido aplicar más de 1.200 millones de dosis, contribuyendo al control o eliminación de enfermedades como la polio, el sarampión, la rubéola y el síndrome de la rubéola congénita.

En términos generales, la Región ha mostrado avances importantes. En 2024, la vacuna triple viral, contra sarampión, rubéola y paperas, alcanzó el 89% en su primera dosis y el 79% en la segunda; la tercera dosis de la vacuna DPT (difteria, pertussis y tétanos) llegó al 87%, la neumocócica conjugada llegó al 85% en su tercera dosis; y la vacunación contra la hepatitis B al nacer aumentó al 78%.

Las Américas también lideran en vacunación contra el virus del papiloma humano, con un 76% de cobertura en niñas menores de 15 años que han recibido al menos una dosis, aunque aún por debajo de la meta del 90%.

Estos avances son alentadores, pero insuficientes. Más de 1,4 millones de niños no recibieron ni una sola dosis de la vacuna contra la difteria, el tétanos y la tos ferina en 2024. Esos niños no son cifras: son vidas, familias y comunidades enteras en riesgo.

Una de nuestras tareas más urgentes en la Región es apoyar a los países a identificar a estos niños y adaptar las estrategias para garantizar que puedan acceder a las vacunas.

En el marco de la Semana de Vacunación en las Américas, los países están intensificando sus acciones: 21 países planean aplicar cerca de 90 millones de dosis. Esto incluye administrar más de 80 millones de dosis contra la influenza, en preparación para la temporada de mayor circulación, y poner al día a más de 7,2 millones de niños y niñas con esquemas incompletos o sin ninguna vacuna.

Permítanme referirme ahora al sarampión. Voy a continuar en inglés.

The Americas was the first region to eliminate measles in 2016. This status was later lost in 2018, regained in 2024, and lost again in 2025. That same year, 14,767 confirmed cases of measles were reported across 13 countries in the Americas, a nearly 32-fold increase compared to 2024. This trend continues in 2026 and is accelerating: as of April 5, more than 15,300 confirmed cases have already been reported, surpassing the total for all of 2025.

Mexico, Guatemala, the United States, and Canada account for the majority of cases, with ongoing transmission also reported in Bolivia and other countries.

Last year, 32 measles-related deaths were reported, and in the first quarter of 2026, 11 deaths have already been recorded, most of them among populations facing the greatest barriers to accessing health services. Measles hits hardest where vulnerability is greatest.

The re-emergence of measles in the Americas is a significant setback, but one that is entirely reversible and demands decisive action.

In Canada, the country reached twelve months of continuous transmission from the same chain in October last year, re-establishing endemic transmission and resulting in the loss of elimination status in both the country and the Region.

In other countries, transmission seems to have continued for more than 12 months, raising concerns about the sustainability of measles elimination in those settings.

Elimination is not a trophy to be stored away—it is an achievement that must be defended every day. As long as measles continues to circulate in other regions of the world, countries in the Americas remain at constant risk of reintroduction.

In 2025, more than 250,000 measles cases were reported globally, over half of them in Africa, the Western Pacific Region, and Europe. Less than 6% occurred in the Americas. In the first three months of 2026, however, our region accounted for 21% of all reported cases worldwide.

Let me be clear: measles is not a mild disease. It can cause serious and permanent complications, including blindness, pneumonia, and encephalitis. In 2025, approximately 13% of infected individuals in the region required hospitalization, and 93% of them were unvaccinated.

We have safe and effective vaccines. The main challenge is not availability, but reaching those who remain unprotected in time.

Low risk perception, misinformation, and barriers to access have all contributed to this situation. When vaccination coverage declines, viruses return. It is that simple.

Measles is one of the most contagious diseases known, finding unvaccinated groups and spreading rapidly. A single case can spark an outbreak if we do not achieve coverage above 95% with two doses.

When it comes to outbreaks, speed matters. The first 72 hours after a case is detected are critical. If we do not act quickly—with prepared teams, contact tracing, vaccination, and effective communication—the virus spreads.

PAHO is supporting countries by strengthening surveillance, rapid response, and microplanning for routine immunization and campaigns, while also facilitating equitable access to vaccines through its Revolving Funds. In 2025 alone, these mechanisms enabled the procurement of 234 million doses with savings of nearly 50%. This year, approximately 25 million measles vaccine doses are expected to be delivered across the Region.

Vaccination is not only an individual decision—it is an act of collective solidarity. Over the past 25 years, measles vaccination has prevented more than 6 million deaths in the Americas.

The Americas have stopped measles before. We can do it again. But it will require sustained political commitment, investment in public health, and decisive action to rebuild trust in vaccines and combat misinformation. I am confident that we can restore the Region's measles-free status. We have done it twice before—we can do it a third time.

And we can go even further: building a Region where no woman dies from cervical cancer, where new vaccines reach every corner, and where vaccine-preventable diseases are a thing of the past—and remain so.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Jarbas Barbosa