Immunization has helped drive this reduction in child mortality: coverage of vaccines that have been in use since the inception of the Expanded Programme on Immunization has expanded, and new vaccines have been introduced. Vaccines against hepatitis B and Haemophilus influenzae type b have become part of national immunization schedules in 179 and 173 countries, respectively; poliomyelitis is nearing eradication; and a large number of deaths from measles are being averted every year. The number of deaths caused by traditional vaccine-preventable diseases (diphtheria, measles, neonatal tetanus, pertussis and poliomyelitis) has fallen from an estimated 0.9 million in 2000 to 0.4 million in 2010.1

New and increasingly sophisticated vaccines that have become available in the last decade, including pneumococcal conjugate vaccine and vaccines against infection with rotavirus and human papillomavirus, are currently being rolled out globally. Efforts are being made to shorten the time lag that has historically existed in the introduction of new vaccines between high- and low-income countries. For example, pneumococcal conjugate vaccines were introduced in low-income countries approximately a year after being introduced in high-income countries.

Through an innovative international collaboration, an affordable conjugate vaccine against Neisseria meningitidis serogroup A was developed and is now in use in the African meningitis belt.

There are now licensed vaccines being used to prevent, or contribute to the prevention and control of, 25 vaccine-preventable infections (Table 1).

The strengthening by countries of national programmes, aided by improved support from and coordination among local, national, regional and international stakeholders, has succeeded in improving immunization coverage rates. Financing from domestic budgets allocated to immunization programmes has risen over the past decade, as has the flow of international resources dedicated to immunization. According to the immunization programme data for 2010,5 154 of the 193 Member States report having a specific budget line item for immunization, and 147 have developed multi-year national plans to sustain the gains achieved, further enhance performance to reach desired goals and introduce appropriate new vaccines.

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