News

More than 60 million people set to benefit from vaccines during vaccination week in the Americas

Communications Unit and Immunization Unit – Pan American Health Organization

As the globe celebrates the 5th anniversary of the World Immunization Week (WIW), the Americas will also be commemorating its 14th year of the Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA), 23-30 April 2016. This year, countries and territories throughout the Western Hemisphere will reach out to around 60 million children and adults during VWA delivering vaccines against diseases, including bacterial pneumonia, diarrhea caused by rotavirus, diphtheria, human papilloma virus (HPV), influenza, measles, mumps, neonatal tetanus, rubella, whooping cough, and yellow fever, among others.

This year’s VWA also coincides with the global switch from the trivalent oral polio vaccine to the bivalent oral polio vaccine, and many countries are combining this activity within the framework of Vaccination Week. Additionally, more than 21 countries and territories have reported plans to integrate activities with other health interventions; a particular focus this year in several countries will be on vector control activities to prevent or control ongoing outbreaks of Chikungunya, Dengue and Zika.

The regional launch for this year’s Vaccination VWA will take place in Kingston, Jamaica on 23 April 2016, with participation from PAHO Director Carissa F. Etienne, Jamaican National Authorities, and partner agencies, followed by national and multinational launch events throughout the region.

Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt, who holds six Olympic gold medals and 11 world championships, is supporting this year’s Vaccination Week, appearing in PAHO-produced promotional messages, such as posters, social media messages, and in a public service announcement (PSA), in which he tells viewers, “I’m up to date on my vaccines. Are you?”

PAHO is also doing a social media campaign using the #GetVax and #GoForTheGold hashtags to encourage people to take photos holding #GetVax signs and post them to social media or to PAHO’s website. A series of tweet chats are also being held at the regional level and in countries to promote Vaccination Week and answer questions on vaccination.

For more information on the VWA, visit this website.
Paraguay Celebrates the switch to bOPV
Pan American Health Organization-Paraguay

At exactly 10:00 am on 18 April 2016, Paraguay became the first country in the Americas to complete the “switch.” At this time all health centers across Paraguay withdrew the trivalent oral polio vaccine (tOPV) and introduced the bivalent Oral Polio Vaccine (bOPV) into the national vaccination schedule.

In a colorful event at the Maternity Hospital of Loma Pytá, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare celebrated the switch and performed a symbolic withdrawal of tOPV and introduction of bOPV. At this ceremony, health authorities of the highest level, along with members of the Immunization Committee, representatives of civil society organizations, military, police, prestigious national athletes, and health care workers, welcomed bOPV, which together with the injectable polio vaccine (IPV), marks the final phase of polio eradication, a disease that for centuries was the cause of infant mortality and severe disability in survivors.

To the sound of sirens, military marches and church bells, Alma Gamarra, a little girl one year and nine months old, received the last dose of tOPV while Adrian Josué Balmaceda Solís, four months old, received the first dose of bOPV from the Minister of Health, Dr Antonio Barrios.

During the ceremony, Dr Carlos Castillo Solorzano, the PAHO/WHO Representative in Paraguay, said: “This year could be the last case of polio worldwide, a historic milestone and legacy for future generations. The previous generation achieved smallpox eradication and now we will achieve polio eradication. The world’s future looks great. There will be no more inequities; we will eradicate polio, measles, rubella and the congenital rubella syndrome.”

At another point Castillo Solorzano said: “This is a time to celebrate the journey, to thank all health workers who contributed to this cause, but also to decisively commit to maintaining the commitment to have a country free of vaccine-preventable diseases.” Finally he said, “Today I also want to celebrate because I am deeply honored to have worked on polio eradication and to have been a part of vaccination efforts in the Americas. The feeling of helping eradicate a disease that causes child paralysis is indescribable. It is quite likely that we will be the last generation to have seen the aftermath of this terrible disease. Images linger in my memory of children with iron legs suffering from polio.”

Alma Gamarra, 1 year and 9 months, received the last dose of tOPV in Paraguay. Credit: PAHO-PAR.

Adrián Josué Balmaceda Solís, 4 months, received the first dose of bOPV in Paraguay. Credit: PAHO-PAR.
Re-Introduction of the Hepatitis B vaccine among newborns in St. Kitts and Nevis: from evidence to action

Eulynis Brown, Ermine Jeffers, Patrick Martin and Retna Walwyn Brown, Ministry of Health, St Kitts and Nevis; Patrice Lawrence-Williams, PAHO/OECC

In 1985, a Hepatitis B sero-prevalence study conducted in St Kitts and Nevis revealed high prevalence rates of Hepatitis B infection (HBV) with the highest risk of acquiring the infection occurring during the perinatal period and in early school years.

In response, the government of St Kitts and Nevis sought to introduce a plasma-derived Hepatitis B vaccine to infants in 1988. The programme was discontinued because of public concerns about the risks of a plasma-derived product.

A recombinant Hepatitis B vaccine was successfully introduced to infants in 2000, as part of a pentavalent combination at ages two, four and six months as recommended. The Ministry of Health, however, was still interested in ascertaining the national prevalence of Hepatitis B infection.

In 2011, the Ministry of Health collaborated with the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to conduct a sero-prevalence study to assess the response to the vaccine. The antenatal population was selected (n=317) since perinatal transmission and its sequelae are associated with significant morbidity and mortality in infants. The study found 3.2% of the pregnant women positive for HBsAg, and 52.4% of the pregnant women tested negative for anti-HBs.

These findings informed changes to the immunization policy and schedule. In October 2015, a birth dose of recombinant Hepatitis B vaccine was re-introduced with inoculation given within 24 hours of birth. This is in-keeping with the PAHO/WHO’s 2009 recommendations for a Hepatitis B vaccination schedule in an intermediate/moderate endemic zone.

Infants are now given the newborn dose in addition to the three-dose pentavalent combination.

At the end of 2015, 122 newborns were already vaccinated with 100% acceptance of the vaccine. Successful implementation may be attributed to longstanding public confidence in and support for the national vaccination programme, a robust communication strategy and unequivocal political support.
Past Meetings/Workshops

Regional workshop for strengthening capacities for measuring, analysis and monitoring of social inequalities in immunizations

Marcela Contreras, Monica Gibbons, Hannah Kurtis, Oscar Mujica and Martha Velandia, Pan American Health Organization

Location: Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Date: 9-11 March 2016

Participants: Technical staff from the Ministries of Health of Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Peru, as well as facilitators from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

Purpose: This workshop was organized by PAHO as a collaborative effort between the Special Programme on Sustainable Development and Health Equity (SDE) and the Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit (IM), in order to strengthen the analytical capacities of countries in the measurement of inequalities in immunization coverage, particularly those related to socioeconomic indicators.

Details: During the three-day workshop, presentations covered the concepts of inequalities in health and immunizations, the Social Determinants of Health and how to utilize specific metrics to measure inequalities in coverage at the subnational level using equity stratifiers.

Participants were asked to bring their own country databases to the workshop to do their own analysis. As part of the workshop agenda, participants had the opportunity to gain hands-on experience carrying out the different types of inequality analyses that were presented.

During the workshop, facilitators emphasized that in addition to increasing rates of national vaccination coverage, countries also need to be cognizant of the need to reduce coverage inequalities at the subnational level. Looking at the relationship between vaccination coverage and socioeconomic indicators can be a key tool to help inform the targeted strategies for national immunization programs.

At the conclusion of the workshop, participants agreed to continue working on this area and extend this work to other countries in the Region.
Third Regional Meeting to share lessons learned in the development and implementation of electronic immunization registries

Marcela Contreras, Gabriela Felix and Martha Velandia, Pan American Health Organization

Location: San José, Costa Rica
Date: 4-6 April 2016

Participants: Representatives from 20 countries of the Americas, three from African countries (Gambia, Tanzania and Zambia), World Health Organization (WHO), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, PATH and both the United States’ and European Union’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Purpose: To share lessons on the planning, development and implementation of Electronic Immunization Registries (EIRs), as well as to socialize a draft document on the planning, design, development and implementation of a national EIR.

Details: During this two-and-a-half day meeting, participants discussed and shared their experiences and lessons learned regarding the development and implementation of EIRs. Furthermore, the meeting participants reviewed the proposed contents of a draft document under development by PAHO’s Improving Data Quality for Immunization (IDQi) Project.

Besides sharing experiences and discussing needed EIR functionalities, different EIR scopes and options for their development and implementation, meeting participants focused on making EIRs sustainable and useful to improve Immunization Program performance and efficiency, as well as a tool for better accountability. Issues regarding governance, legal frameworks, financial and human resources as well as how EIR and other immunization information systems fit into the countries’ overarching eHealth strategies were emphasized.

As mentioned in the objectives, PAHO is developing a practical guide on the planning, design, development and implementation of an EIR. This document responds to recommendations and regional mandates that support adopting information and communication technologies in health, and particularly EIRs and is drawing from successful experiences and lessons learned from countries of the Region. To this end, this third regional meeting to share experiences was very useful.
ProVac Regional Workshop on the use of economic evidence for vaccine decision-making: the case of meningococcal vaccination

Gabriela Felix and Cara Janusz, Pan American Health Organization

Location: San Jose, Costa Rica
Date: 6-8 April 2016

Participants: Countries from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), World Health Organization (WHO), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, PATH, United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US-CDC), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Agence de Médecine Préventive (AMP), Harvard School of Public Health, Rutgers University School of Public Health, Sabin Vaccine Institute, and ProVac Centers of Excellence (Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Universidad de Cartagena and IECS).

Purpose: To provide national public health experts with training on tools and methods to estimate the impact, costs and cost-effectiveness of vaccines in order to guide decision makers in developing evidence-based immunization policies. The workshop will feature case examples for meningococcal vaccination.

Details: This two-and-a-half day workshop brought together participants from the Member States from PAHO. They were joined by global experts on decision science and evidence-based policy-making for immunization programmes from WHO’s headquarters, AMP, the US CDC, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, PATH and various academic institutions that provide expert guidance to PAHO’s ProVac Initiative. The primary aim of the workshop was to provide national public health experts with training on tools and methods to estimate the impact, costs and cost-effectiveness of vaccines in order to guide decision-makers in developing evidence-based immunization policies. It also served as the launching venue for three new ProVac tools (UNIVAC, COSTVAC and COST-CARE), as well as the presentation of the soon to be available ProVac eToolKit.
## Calendar

### 2016

#### May

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-11</td>
<td>Measles Vaccines in Older Age Groups</td>
<td>Sienna, Italy</td>
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<td>11-13</td>
<td>EMRO Regional Working Group Meeting</td>
<td>Lahore, Pakistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>19-20</td>
<td>Executive Board – Programme Budget Administration Committee</td>
<td>Geneva, Switzerland</td>
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<tr>
<td>23-28</td>
<td>Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly</td>
<td>Geneva, Switzerland</td>
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#### June

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<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>7th Meeting of South-East Asia Regional Immunization Technical Advisory Group (SEAR-ITAG) &amp; EPI Managers’ meeting</td>
<td>New Delhi, India</td>
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<tr>
<td>13-17</td>
<td>WPRO Technical Advisory Group</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>Accelerating Progress towards Measles and Rubella Control and Elimination</td>
<td>Geneva, Switzerland</td>
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<td>22-23</td>
<td>Gavi Board Meeting</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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#### September

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<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>Regional Committee for SEARO</td>
<td>Colombo, Sri Lanka</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>Twelfth International Rotavirus Symposium</td>
<td>Melbourne, Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>12-15</td>
<td>Regional Committee for EURO</td>
<td>Copenhagen, Denmark</td>
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<td>19-21</td>
<td>AFRO IST West - EPI Managers meeting</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-28</td>
<td>FRO IST East &amp; South - EPI Managers meeting</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<td>26-30</td>
<td>Regional Committee for the Americas</td>
<td>Washington DC, USA</td>
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#### October

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<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>Regional Committee for EMRO</td>
<td>Cairo, Egypt</td>
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<td>10-14</td>
<td>7th Biregional Meeting on the Prevention and Control of Japanese Encephalitis</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>16th European Technical Advisory Group of Experts (ETAGE)</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>Regional Committee for WPRO</td>
<td>Manila, Philippines</td>
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<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>Meeting of the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on Immunization</td>
<td>Geneva, Switzerland</td>
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<tr>
<td>24-26</td>
<td>5th Meeting of the European Regional Verification Commission (RVC) for Measles and Rubella Elimination</td>
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#### November

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<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>EURO Regional NITAG meeting</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>14-18</td>
<td>TAG meeting WHO/PATH Maternal Influenza Immunization Project</td>
<td>Geneva, Switzerland</td>
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#### December

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>Gavi Board Meeting</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>AFRO Technical Advisory Group</td>
<td>Brazzaville, DRC</td>
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### Organizations and Initiatives

- **American Red Cross**
- **Agence de Médecine Préventive**
- **Africhol**
- **EpiVacPlus**
- **LOGIVAC Project**
- **National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups Resource Center**
- **SIVAC**

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
- **Polio**
- **Global Vaccines and Immunization**

- **Johns Hopkins**
  - **International Vaccine Access Center**
  - **Vaccine Information Management System**

- **JSI**
  - **Africa Routine Immunization Systems Essentials Project**
  - **IMMUNIZATIONbasics**
  - **Immunization Center**
  - **Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program (MCHIP)**

- **PAHO**
  - **ProVac Initiative**

- **PATH**
  - **Vaccine Resource Library**
  - **Rotavirus Vaccine Access and Delivery**
  - **Malaria Vaccine Initiative**
  - **Meningitis Vaccine Project**
  - **RHO Cervical Cancer**

- **Sabin Vaccine Institute**
  - **Sustainable Immunization Financing**

- **UNICEF**
  - **Immunization**
  - **Supplies and Logistics**

- **USAID**
  - **Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program**

- **WHO**
  - **Department of Immunization, Vaccines & Biologicals**
  - **New and Under-utilized Vaccines Implementation**
  - **ICO Information Centre on HPV and Cancer**
  - **Immunization financing**
  - **Immunization service delivery**
  - **Immunization surveillance, assessment and monitoring**
  - **SIGN Alliance**

- **Other**
  - **Coalition Against Typhoid**
  - **Dengue Vaccine Initiative**
  - **European Vaccine Initiative**
  - **Gardasil Access Program**
  - **Gavi the Vaccine Alliance**
  - **International Association of Public Health Logisticians**
  - **International Vaccine Institute**
  - **Measles & Rubella Initiative**
  - **Multinational Influenza Seasonal Mortality Study**
  - **Network for Education and Support in Immunisation (NESI)**
  - **TechNet-21**
  - **Vaccines Today**

### WHO Regional Websites

- **Routine Immunization and New Vaccines (AFRO)**
- **Immunization (PAHO)**
- **Vaccine-preventable diseases and immunization (EMRO)**
- **Vaccines and immunization (EURO)**
- **Immunization (SEARO)**
- **Immunization (WPRO)**

### UNICEF Regional Websites

- **Immunization (Central and Eastern Europe)**
- **Immunization (Eastern and Southern Africa)**
- **Immunization (South Asia)**
- **Immunization (West and Central Africa)**
- **Child survival (Middle East and Northern Africa)**
- **Health and nutrition (East Asia and Pacific)**
- **Health and nutrition (Americas)**

### Newsletters

- **Immunization Monthly update in the African Region** (AFRO)
- **Immunization Newsletter** (PAHO)
- **The Civil Society Dose** (GAVI CSO Constituency)
- **TechNet Digest**
- **RotaFlash** (PATH)
- **Gavi Programme Bulletin** (Gavi)