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Celebrating Vaccination Week in the Americas during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ana Elena Chevez, Alba Maria Ropero, Lauren Vulanovic, Maite Vera Antelo, Octavia Silva, PAHO-Washington, DC

- 2 Following the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) considered different options to celebrate Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA). The 18th annual VWA was scheduled from 25 April to 2 May 2020 with the slogan "Love. Trust. Protect. #GetVax"
 - VWA is a flexible initiative, allowing countries to develop a range of activities beyond vaccination campaigns, including educational campaigns to promote vaccination as a right and the importance of leaving no one behind. Traditionally, VWA celebrations have been accompanied by massive mobilization in the communities, with fairs, official public launches, and other events. Due to the COVID-19 emergency, PAHO recommended the cancellation of massive events, while maintaining the visibility of VWA and vaccination on countries' political agendas with participation from high-level authorities in virtual events and through the media.



Poster for the 18th vaccination week in the Americas.

Countries and PAHO's regional office

developed different activities, including a message from PAHO's Director at

her weekly press conference to

highlight the importance of vaccination

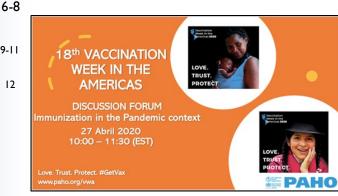
in the framework of VWA, a virtual

forum to present and discuss recom-

mendations regarding the development

of the Region's immunization programme in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as two tweet chats from PAHO's regional Twitter

accounts to answer questions from the public about immunization during the



Poster for the 18th vaccination week in the Americas.

pandemic.

Those responsible for national immunization programmes, epidemiological surveillance and laboratory activities for vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) in the countries, members of PAHO's Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Vaccine-preventable Diseases, members of National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs) in the countries, and partners of immunization programmes all participated in the virtual forum. The Region of the Americas used the unique circumstances of this year's VWA to promote equity and access to vaccination and to highlight the essential work of national immunization programmes.

For more information on VWA, please visit www.paho.org/vwa Additional links:

- VWA message from PAHO Director, Carissa F. Etienne
- Recording of VWA forum in Spanish
- Recording of VWA forum in English

year

when



European Immunization Week 2020 reinforced importance of routine immunization services during the COVID-19 pandemic

Katharina Dolezal, WHO Regional Office for Europe

Every year, the WHO European Region celebrates <u>European Immunization Week (EIW)</u> to raise awareness of the importance of immunization in preventing diseases and protecting lives. By bringing together stakeholders both at the regional and the country level, EIW serves as a unique opportunity to foster strong partnerships to promote vaccination as an essential stepping stone to achieve Health for All.

This year was EIW's 15th anniversary. While the initiative was initially rolled out in 2005 as a pilot study in a small number of countries, EIW now stands as one of the most visible health campaigns throughout the Region.

The adaptable nature of this campaign proved to be of particular value this

As champions of vaccination, nurses and midwives help protect health for all.

WHO/Europe, social media tile to mark EIW and the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife.



Public Health Institute of Poland, poster announcing a webinar about COVID-19 and immunization.

many health systems and immunization delivery services were coping with the rapidly evolving COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, both regional and national initiatives and materials, including a social media package in many languages, and a joint UNICEF/WHO press release, were launched to promote WHO and national guidance on the continuation of routine immunization services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The WHO Regional Director for Europe and HRH the Crown Princess of Denmark, Patron of the Regional Office, both made statements encouraging parents to not miss any opportunity to protect their children from preventable diseases. The high visibility and versatility of EIW could be utilized to reinforce the importance of vaccines in preventing outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles and polio, and in reducing the burden on health systems already strained by the pandemic.

Countries throughout the Region utilized EIW to organize virtual events to inform the public and health workers about additional safety measures taken to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission during vaccination sessions. Social media channels were used as the primary communication channel.



Chile Vaccinates Population against Influenza during COVID-19 Pandemic

Cecilia Gonzalez, Pamela Burgos, Ministry of Health-Chile; Marcela Contreras, PAHO

As is done every year, Chile organized its seasonal influenza vaccination campaign for the established target population,

to be started in mid-March 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, its implementation this year was different as, at the time of the campaign launch on 16 March 2020, the first cases of COVID-19 had appeared in the country. Consequently, health authorities appealed to the population to be vaccinated against influenza, especially those at-risk, i.e. health personnel, those aged 65 and over, children aged six months to five years, schoolchildren from first to fifth grade (aged between six and 10 years



approx.), pregnant women, populations with chronic diseases from 11 to 64 years, among others. Additionally, in the Emergency Operational Committee convened by the Ministry of the Interior on 16 March 2020, other groups of the population deemed key during a pandemic situation, such as the armed forces, firefighters, police, public transportation personnel, and marginalized and homeless people were included in the target population for vaccination.

Circumstances in the context of operational restrictions and lockdown conditions, such as quarantines in some municipalities and population groups, suspension of classes in educational establishments and universities, etc., required the Chilean National Immunization Programme (NIP) and health personnel to seek strategies to address target populations, considering traditional and innovative strategies such as: vaccination by appointment, vaccination in the car (immunization drive-in), vaccination at home and in the community, and vaccination in educational establishments .

This joint work between the public and private sectors, the high demand of the population for influenza vaccination, and the strong commitment from health personnel, resulted in historical results for influenza vaccination. At the end of the first week of vaccination, the number of vaccinated had reached 47.5% of the target population. As of 25 May 2020, data from the Department of Statistics and Health information, showed that national coverage had reached 93% of the target population.

The second stage of this necessary and successful campaign will be to administer the second dose of influenza vaccine to those children for whom this was their first dose, and to vaccinate all children and schoolchildren, and other groups with lower coverage.



Adapting and Innovating Influenza Vaccination Strategies in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ana Elena Chevez, Alba Maria Ropero, Lauren Vulanovic, Maite Vera Antelo, Octavia Silva, PAHO-Washington, DC

Immediately after the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, immunization programmes in the countries of the Region of the Americas, together with PAHO/WHO, began to analyze and consider how to adapt vaccination strategies during the pandemic. This was especially important for 17 countries using the influenza vaccine formulated for the Southern Hemisphere, who were organizing the vaccination of nearly 100 million people.

In the Americas, influenza annually causes $\sim 772,000$ hospitalizations in the general population and $\sim 52,000$ deaths that primarily affect adults over the age of 65. This shows that efforts to control influenza would reduce the hospital burden that was already becoming apparent and would be important during the pandemic.





Vaccination efforts in the Region of the Americas.

On 26 March 2020, PAHO/WHO issued a first technical document on immunization in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this document, countries were urged to consider vaccination an essential health service that should not be interrupted in the context of the pandemic, and recommended prioritizing vaccination against influenza and measles, given outbreaks of these diseases in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. In the case of influenza, PAHO/WHO emphasized prioritizing the vaccination of health personnel, older adults, people with chronic diseases, and pregnant women. There was an immediate adaptation of the processes and regulations to guarantee the protection of the health of primary healthcare workers and to guarantee safe vaccination for the population and vaccinators.

Some of the innovative strategies implemented by countries to maintain vaccination in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic included:

- Fixed immunization posts in schools, to use the facilities which were empty due to the suspension of classes
- Mobile vaccination posts in pharmacies, banks, and/or community centers (when the population collects vouchers or food)
- Vaccination of captive populations in prisons and asylums
- Vaccination drive-throughs

National authorities in the Region set the example by vaccinating against influenza, thus motivating the population to protect themselves.

As of 19 May 2020, approximately 60 million people had been vaccinated against influenza. This number of people



Vaccination efforts in the Region of the Americas.

that benefitted from this essential health service in turn reflects the effort, commitment of health personnel and the resilience of the Region's immunization programmes and health systems in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.



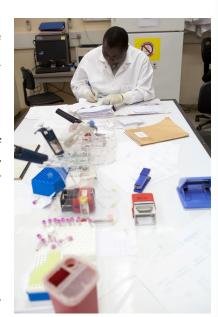
Devex opinion piece by Dr Deb Atherly urges: "To deliver a COVID-19 vaccine equitably, we must start planning now"

Claire Felten, PATH

"We will not reap the full benefits of a potential COVID-19 vaccine's protective power unless we plan now to ensure it is made available globally in an equitable way," writes Deborah Atherly—global head of policy, access, and introduction for PATH's center for vaccine innovation and access—in <u>Devex</u>.

Dr Atherly's opinion piece emphasizes the importance of starting to plan for vaccine manufacture and global delivery even before we have a viable vaccine candidate. She writes that a COVID-19 vaccine must reach all countries, regardless of income level, as quickly as possible once it becomes available—requiring consideration of those living in the hardest-to-reach corners of the globe. "A business-asusual approach will not do," she writes. "Not only is there an urgent need to stop the pandemic, but vaccines are also inherently more difficult to deliver at scale to adults."

Dr Atherly proposes a few key steps for success. To start, she urges us to focus on those most at need, ensuring the first vaccine supplies go where they are needed most. She also emphasizes the importance of adapting guidance to local conditions and ensuring that a wide range of stakeholders have a voice at the decision-making table. She recommends building on—and strengthening—the systems and services we have to deliver vaccines in every way we can think of. And finally, she says, we need to start now. "If we wait until the vaccine is ready to roll out to start solving the how, where, and who of distribution, the world will not be ready."



Delivering a COVID-19 vaccine globally and equitably will require collaboration at all levels, from heads of state to those on the front lines—such as this laboratory worker in

Read the full article at this link.



Past Meetings/Workshops

Remote Training to Strengthen National Measles and Rubella Laboratory in Mexico

Emilia Cain¹, Edith Cruz Ramirez², Herlinda García Lozano², Gloria Rey-Benito¹ PAHO¹, InDRE²

Location: Virtual training

Date: 20 April 2020

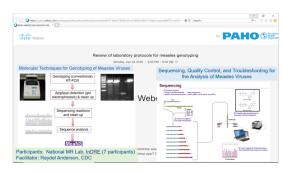
Participants: CDC, InDRE, PAHO, and PAHO's country

office in Mexico.

Purpose: To review genotyping and sequencing analyses

to strengthen Mexico's national measles and

rubella laboratory capacities.



A presentation during the Virtual Training

Details:

The Institute for Epidemiologic Diagnosis and Reference (InDRE, for its name in Spanish) is Mexico's public health laboratory. InDRE's national measles and rubella laboratory is part of the Regional Measles and Rubella Laboratory Network in which PAHO plays an important capacity building role. Through coordinated activities with the CDC, PAHO organizes on-site training of personnel in national laboratories with one such training planned in Mexico. Given the current COVID-19 situation, the on-site training had to be cancelled. However, regular surveillance activities need to continue and assuring high quality laboratory surveillance constitutes a priority, especially as the country faces a measles outbreak.

To this end, PAHO, CDC and InDRE organized a remote training. During the training, CDC presented the procedures for genotyping and sequencing analyses to InDRE's personnel. Afterwards, laboratory procedures were reviewed, practical exercises were presented, and questions were answered.

The training was rated as successful by all participants and the objectives were accomplished. Even though remote trainings have their limitations, this experience is valuable as we move forward and face ongoing challenges for the organization of on-site trainings.



Webinar: Maintaining commitment for immunization in Africa through COVID-19 and beyond

Claire Felten, PATH

Location: Webinar

Date: 6 May 2020

Participants: Speaker: Dr Marthe Sylvie Essengue Elouma, Regional Head for Francophone Africa at

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

Panelist: Dr Alfred Driwale, Manager of the National Expanded Programme on Immuniza-

tion, Uganda

Panelist: Fred Njobvu, Implementation Manager, PATH, Zambia

Moderator: Rachel Ndirangu, Regional Advocacy & Policy Officer, PATH, Kenya.

Purpose: In the lead-up to the Gavi replenishment to mobilise resources to support expanded immunization

programmes in countries, this virtual discussion invited government and civil society leaders from African countries to explore approaches to sustaining vaccine services during COVID-19 and mobi-

lizing civil society and policymakers to secure sustained support for immunization.

Details: During this webinar presented by PATH, the BID Learning Network, and Gavi, panelists

emphasized the importance of ensuring vaccine systems are primed to deliver through COVID—both for the continuation of routine vaccinations and for rolling out the COVID vaccine once it is available—and that countries must plan for catch-up vaccination activities after the pandemic is over. **Dr Marthe Sylvie Essengue Elouma** (Gavi) spoke about equitable roll-out of the COVID vaccine, and the importance of preventing a double or triple epidemic as the result of reduced coverage—noting that Gavi is adapting to meet country needs during this unique time. **Dr Alfred Driwale** (EPI Uganda) reported on the drop in vaccine coverage he is seeing in Uganda as parents are uncertain about how to continue vaccination safely, as well as the tactics Uganda used to avoid vaccine stockouts; and **Fred Njobvu** (PATH) spoke of Zambia's efforts to gather and use data from electronic immunization registries (EIR) to track immunization trends that will allow officials to target missed children after the pandemic.

More information:

- Webinar Recording
- PATH Live Forum Series: Understanding COVID-19
- Summary write-up
- Article: Protecting essential health services during COVID-19
- PATH database of policy guidance for maintaining essential health services in LMICs during COVID-19



Interactive Webinar on infection prevention and control (IPC) for immunization during COVID-19

Location: Webinar

Date: 29 May 2020

Participants: 381 active attendees from around the world.

To assist countries in operationalizing the WHO IPC recommendations for COVID-19 in the con-Purpose:

text of immunization.

Details: WHO and the Boost Community, in partnership with TechNet-21 and The Geneva Learning Foun-

> dation conducted a webinar on how WHO IPC recommendations for COVID-19 can be operationalized in the context of immunization. During the registration process questions were collected from individuals, many of which were addressed during the presentation. The interactive format offered an opportunity for participants to ask questions pertinent to their own context to which

WHO panel directly responded both during and at the conclusion of the presentation.

An overview of the core components of IPC was presented, which included standard precautions for all health-care settings, with particular emphasis on hand and respiratory hygiene, and description of personal protective equipment and their rational use. The webinar highlighted the importance for health workers of conducting a risk assessment before any interaction with a vaccinee, to assess and analyze the potential for exposure to COVID-19 and to determine the need for the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). The following key aspects were addressed during the Webinar:

- Risk assessment recommendations at the strategic level (programme leaders at national and subnational levels) and at the service delivery level (individual health workers);
- Recommended IPC activities at the delivery level (fixed and outreach posts in routine immunization, and vaccination posts in mass campaigns) depending on the type of COVID-19 transmission;
- Use of PPE during vaccination sessions, the PPE required when managing suspected COVID-19 cases, and the contents of the recommended IPC kit for outreach and campaign sessions;
- Setting up a safe vaccination site including the organization/flow of screening intended for early recognition and immediate isolation of patients with suspected COVID-19;
- Importance of risk communication and community engagement concerning the safety of the vaccination site.

WHO panelists received and addressed about 30 questions that arrived during the presentation. These related to IPC recommendations for water-scarce environments, detailed queries on the use of PPE for health workers and clients (i.e. handmade/cloth masks, use of gloves), solutions for addressing apprehension of parents regarding dropper usage for oral vaccine administration, and clarifications about the risk assessment process.

A recording of the session, along with the slides (soon to be translated into French and Spanish) and the questions and answers are available on https://boostcommunity.org. The slides contain links to



Physical distancing, Measles Campaign



Use of infection prevention and control equipment during immunization session. Indonesia, April 2020



Resources

Implementing the Immunization Programme in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Region of the Americas

Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit, PAHO

On 26 March 2020, the WHO published the <u>Guiding principles for immunization activities</u> <u>during the COVID-19 pandemic: interim guidance</u>, while WHO Director General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, stressed that, "The best defense against any outbreak is a strong health system. COVID-19 is showing how fragile many of the world's health systems are, forcing countries to make difficult decisions to meet the needs of their people."

At the same time, PAHO/WHO published the first version of the technical document The Immunization Programme in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, developed through consultation with various departments within the Organization and externally with the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Vaccine-preventable Diseases.



This document was discussed with managers of immunization programmes in the Americas, TAG members, members of National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs)and immunization programme partners. Topics covered in this document include:

- Routine vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Vaccination of people diagnosed with COVID-19 and their contacts
- · Carrying out vaccination campaigns
- Guidelines for vaccination posts
- Reestablishment of vaccination services
- Supply of vaccines, supplies and cold chain
- Epidemiological surveillance of vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs)

Due to the constant generation of new evidence on transmission of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and its implications for public health, PAHO determined that the document would be updated, as necessary. Accordingly, the <u>second version was published on 24 April 2020</u>, which contains updates and additions on the following topics:

- Importance of maintaining the population's confidence in immunization services
- Update on the use of masks
- Importance of vaccination against hepatitis B during the first 24 hours of life
- Regular and systematic registration of the population that is pending vaccination
- Update on vaccinating a person infected with COVID-19 (suspected or confirmed) and their contacts
- Effectiveness of BCG and OPV vaccines to prevent COVID-19

PAHO/WHO will continue to review and update these recommendations as new evidence becomes available.

Meeting the Challenge of Vaccination Hesitancy

Samia Kemal, Sabin Vaccine Institute at the Aspen Institute

The Sabin-Aspen Vaccine Science & Policy Group, a joint initiative of the Sabin Vaccine Institute (Sabin) and the Aspen Institute, released its second annual report, "Meeting the Challenge of Vaccination Hesitancy," a global call to understand the root causes and behaviors around vaccine hesitancy, build collaboration across sectors to address online misinformation and improve vaccine acceptance and demand.

The end of the COVID-19 pandemic will depend on our ability to address vaccine hesitancy, one of the top 10 threats to global health, before a vaccine is put on the market. This report lays out actionable steps that leaders across healthcare, research, philanthropy and technology fields can take to build confidence in vaccines and vaccinations.

Sabin has also created a <u>social media toolkit</u> including links to the report, videos from Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and the Sabin-Aspen group co-chairs, quote graphics from group members and other promotional assets.



Meeting of the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization, 31 March- I April 2020: conclusions and recommendations

The full report, published in the Weekly epidemiological record (WER) can be found at the following <u>link</u>.



WIISE Mart: Providing a single source of immunization data truth

Sebastien Antoni and Kristi James, WIISE - WHO Immunization Information System

The key to the WHO Immunization Information System (WIISE) is the central data warehouse that brings together currently fragmented data systems and elements, data governance and workflows that differ across WHO Offices into a single point of data.

In collaboration with the IT Department at WHO/HQ the WIISE team has enhanced an existing internal data ware-housing solution (xMART), and provided the project with a solid system for data management. WIISE Regional and HQ focal points have collaborated to prioritize the datasets to be included in the first release of WIISE Mart (the WIISE area of xMART) and to develop data models that would accommodate the data elements collected by the different WHO Regional Offices. Collaboration with the newly formed WHO Data Division is ongoing on the setup of data governance and data sharing rules and policies.

Now that the initial structure for the WIISE Mart data warehouse is operational, the WIISE team is developing pipelines to feed measles and rubella surveillance data from Regional Offices and Member States into the WIISE Mart warehouse. Although this process will require extensive testing to ensure data accuracy, once completed, WIISE Mart functionalities will allow WHO to streamline workflows on a global scale, retain data ownership at the regional and national levels, and provide data governance for data storage in one location. Although it is not a public facing product of the WIISE project, WIISE Mart will be essential and serve the data needs of all other components of the



WIISE project.

Feb 2020 WIISE focal point meeting with the WIISE Mart data model expertly and beautifully mapped.



Complete list of COVID-19 learning resources

OpenWHO currently offers courses covering the following topics and languages to support the response to COVID-19:

- A general introduction to emerging respiratory viruses, including novel coronaviruses (available in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish, Hindi, Hungarian, Indian Sign Language, Indonesian, Macedonian, Persian, Portuguese, Serbian, Turkish, Vietnamese and Urdu);
- Clinical care SARI (available in English, French, Russian, Spanish, Indonesian, Portuguese and Vietnamese);
- Health and safety briefing for respiratory diseases ePROTECT (available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish, Indonesian and Portuguese);
- IPC for COVID-19 (available in Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Macedonian, Polish, Portuguese, Serbian and Turkish);
- COVID-19 operational planning guidelines and partners platform to support country preparedness and response (available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Indonesian, Russian and Portuguese);
- SARI treatment facility design (available in Arabic, English, Italian, Portuguese and Russian);
- An introduction to Go.Data (available in English and coming soon in additional languages);
- How to put on and remove PPE for COVID-19 (available in English and coming soon in additional languages); and
- Standard precautions for hand hygiene (available in English and coming soon in additional languages).



Links

Organizations and Initiatives

American Red Cross

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Global Vaccines and Immunization

Johns Hopkins

International Vaccine Access Center
Value of Immunization Compendium of Evidence (VolCE)

VIEW-hub

IMMUNIZATIONbasics

Immunization Center Matemal and Child Health Integrated Program (MCHIP)

Publications and Resources Universal Immunization through Improving Family Health Ser-

vices (UI-FHS) Project in Ethiopia

PAHO

ProVac Initiative

PATH

Better Immunization Data (BID) Initiative

Center for Vaccine Innovation and Access

Defeat Diarrheal Disease Initiative

Vaccine Resource Library

Malaria Vaccine Initiative RHO Cervical Cancer

Sabin Vaccine Institute

Boost - A Global Community of Immunization Professionals

UNICEF

Supplies and Logistics

USAID

USAID Immunization

USAID Maternal and Child Survival Program

WHO

Department of Immunization, Vaccines & Biologicals

ICO Information Centre on HPV and Cancer

National programmes and systems

Immunization planning and financing
Immunization monitoring and surveillance
National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups Resource Center

SIGN Alliance

Other

Coalition Against Typhoid
Confederation of Meningitis Organizations

Dengue Vaccine Initiative

European Vaccine Initiative Gardasil Access Program

Gavi the Vaccine Alliance

Immunization Economics resource

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)

Stop Pneumonia

TechNet-21 Vaccine Safety Net

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

<u>Immunization (Central and Eastern Europe)</u>

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)

WHO/Europe Vaccine-preventable diseases and immunization (VPI) news (EURO)

Immunization Newsletter (PAHO)

The Civil Society Dose (GAVI CSO Constituency)

TechNet Digest

RotaFlash (PATH)

Vaccine Delivery Research Digest (Uni of Washington)

Gavi Programme Bulletin (Gavi)

Immunization Economics Community of Practice