

Distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues, and members of the media,

We warmly welcome you to this press conference to mark World Immunization Week. This year, the week coincides with a remarkable milestone – 50 years of the Expanded Programme on Immunization, or EPI.

When launched in 1974, this WHO initiative started out with a limited series of vaccines against just six childhood diseases. Today, EPI offers protection against 13 vaccine-preventable diseases, reflecting the initiative's incredible progress.

Here in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, more than 25 million lives have been saved thanks to the power of vaccines.

Immunization's life-saving benefits extend beyond childhood, with many countries introducing newer vaccines that protect against pneumonia, diarrhoea and even certain cancers.

Millions of people of all ages and backgrounds across the Region have been protected by COVID-19 vaccines. This wouldn't have been possible without the unwavering partnership of immunization partners like UNICEF and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the commitment of our Member States.

These achievements are a source of immense pride. But there's more to be done.

Equitable access to immunization remains a key challenge. We must reach every child, in every community, including those who have missed doses due to conflict, displacement, or weak health systems.

Extending the benefits of vaccines throughout life is also crucial. We need to ensure continued

protection for every person by adding new vaccines to national immunization schedules.

This World Immunization Week, let's reaffirm our commitment to immunization. It's humanly possible to protect everyone from disease and create a healthier future.

I'd like to extend a special welcome to our esteemed colleagues joining the panel today:

Marc Rubin, Deputy Regional Director of the UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office, and Thabani Maphosa, Managing Director of Country Programmes, of the Gavi Secretariat.

Together, let's bridge the gap, reach every child, every community, and build a future where everyone is shielded by the power of vaccines.

Thank you.

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