



A man taking his daughter to receive a polio vaccination during the conducting of a national immunization day in Afghanistan 29 April 2012 – World Vaccination Week was celebrated in Kabul on 29 April 2012 in the presence of Dr uraya

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Dalil, Minister of Public Health of Afghanistan, Mr Sediq Patman, Deputy Minister of Education, Peter Crowley, UNICEF's Representative to Afghanistan and WHO Representative Dr Karam Shah. The Minister of Public Health stressed the importance of continued support for Afghanistan to improve outreach of vaccination campaigns where every child is vaccinated.

The commitment of the Ministry to vaccinating all Afghans is evinced by the expansion of immunization service delivery from 870 vaccination centres (Expanded Programme on Immunization fixed centres) in 2004 to 1251 in 2011. Sixty immunization teams comprising 2700 staff provide immunization services all over the country. Immunization is one of four health-related targets of national health policy and strategy (2011–2015) to achieve the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

All Afghani women have been encouraged to obtain the tetanus toxoid vaccine against tetanus.

The three-course vaccine protects women in their childbearing years. The protection of anti-bodies to babies is then passed on for a short time.

Achievements

Achievements of the Afghan immunization programme have included:

- increased vaccination coverage with three doses of diphtheria–tetanus–pertussis (DTP3-penta3), a key indicator of routine coverage, increased from 83% in 2009 to 87% in 2010.
- improvements in routine measles-containing vaccine coverage from 46% in 2001 to 79% in 2010.

Challenges

Afghanistan faces challenges in reaching every community. An overloaded infrastructure and logistics system, varying technical and managerial capacity; also a lack of understanding of the importance of immunization in the population and false rumours questioning vaccine safety all contribute to why equitable access to vaccines has not yet been achieved. Approximately, 90% of unimmunized or incompletely immunized children live in low income, fragile health infrastructure, and difficult geographical terrain and conflict areas. All agreed, harm or death of a child by a preventable disease like polio and measles is unacceptable and we must work harder to eradicate these diseases from Afghanistan.

The international community must continue its support for immunization in Afghanistan to meet this basic need for global health security. Therefore, additional assistance to the national government, from partners and donors is needed to ensure children in Afghanistan have access to these life saving vaccines.

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