

19 April 2017, Cairo – On the occasion of World Immunization Week – celebrated annually between 24 and 30 April – WHO highlights the vital importance of immunization as the most cost-effective preventative intervention in public health. Under the theme “#VaccinesWork”, World Immunization Week in 2017 calls on governments and all stakeholders to ensure strong country commitment for immunization as a priority, demand immunization as a right and responsibility and equitably extend the benefits of immunization to all people.

It also highlights the progress achieved over the past years in introducing new vaccines and increasing vaccination coverage and outlines the challenges facing many countries in closing the immunization gap to meet global vaccination targets by 2020.

Immunization prevents around 3 million deaths annually; however, an additional 1.5 million lives could be saved if global vaccination coverage improves. The Global Vaccine Action Plan, endorsed by WHO’s 194 Member States during the World Health Assembly in May 2012, and the Eastern Mediterranean vaccine action plan, endorsed by the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in 2015, provide a framework to prevent millions of deaths by 2020 through the provision of more equitable access to existing vaccines for people in all communities.

Despite the progress in vaccination coverage worldwide, vaccination targets remain off track. “3.8 million children under one year of age in the Region, or almost 1 in 5 children, did not receive their third dose of diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus (DPT3)-containing vaccines in 2015, according to WHO/UNICEF estimates,” says Dr Mahmoud Fikri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

Many opportunities to reach unvaccinated children and close the immunization gap are still being missed every day in the Region due to the situation prevailing in many countries. “It is unfortunate that progress in WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Region has been hindered as a result of unrest and insecurity in almost one third of countries in the Region,” noted Dr Fikri, “Nevertheless, vaccines are still reaching vulnerable populations through the efforts of those, such as nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations, working to prevent disease and mortality,” he added.

To improve vaccination coverage, WHO is calling on countries to reach more children missed

by routine delivery systems, especially those living in countries, districts or areas where less than 80% of them are receiving vaccines or those living in countries affected by conflict or emergency.

Immunization is a path towards achieving sustainable development and global health security. Investing in vaccination brings many benefits to health and the economy alike. WHO urges Member States to invest in immunization programmes, in line with the Global Vaccine Action Plan and regional action plan, as it is estimated that one dollar spent on immunization brings more than 16 times the return in economic benefit, proving once again that immunization programmes are one of the best cost-effective public health interventions.

“I would also like to take this opportunity to urge communities to demand immunization as their right, and partners to support immunization programmes where this external support is still required by governments, as everyone should benefit through access to vaccines which work,” Dr Fikri said.



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[Message for Mahmoud Fikri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean on the occasion of immunization week in the Eastern Mediterranean Region 2017](#)

[World Immunization Week 2017: #VaccinesWork](#)

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For further information:

Mona Yassin  
Communications Officer  
Tel: +201006019284  
yassinm@who.int

Dr Irtaza Chaudahri  
Technical Officer  
Tel: +201225604046  
chaudhrii@who.int

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