

With a spirit of integration, commitment and cooperation, health authorities from countries across the Region are in the final stage of preparations for the first Vaccination Week in the Eastern Mediterranean. This initiative, led by the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean will take place from 24 to 30 April 2010 and coincides with similar endeavours established in two other WHO regions – Vaccination Week in the Americas and European Immunization Week.

Vaccination Week in the Eastern Mediterranean provides a unique opportunity to revive the Region's commitment and increase public awareness on the importance of immunization through advocacy, education and communication. To date, the initiative has received overwhelming support, with participation from the 22 countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. A variety of activities will be carried out during the week including outreach, campaigns, workshops, training sessions, social mobilization, round tables, exhibitions and media events addressing a wide range of vaccine-related issues. The target audiences for these activities include parents, caregivers, health workers, mass media, decision-makers and stakeholders.

Under the patronage of Her Excellency Mrs Wafaa Michel Sleiman, First Lady of Lebanon, the regional launching ceremony of the Vaccination Week will be held in Beirut on Saturday, 24 April 2010. As a respected public figure advocating for the well-being of people in the Region, H.E the First Lady will bring much-deserved attention to the vital role of immunization in preventing illness and death from vaccine-preventable diseases. Her genuine interest and commitment to public health will help attract key decision-makers and stakeholders in the Region to the message that an immunized and healthy child will have a better chance at education and development.

Vaccines and immunization have played a remarkable and important role in protecting an increasing number of people against vaccine-preventable diseases. With support from the Regional Office, countries in the Region have witnessed remarkable success in reducing morbidity and mortality. Some regional achievements include: the eradication of smallpox; increased vaccination coverage with three doses of diphtheria–tetanus–pertussis (DTP3) vaccine from 18% in 1980 to 87% in 2009; reaching the 90% measles mortality reduction target three years ahead of schedule; maintaining 20 polio-free countries; and utilizing national immunization programmes as a platform to provide other life-saving health interventions such as vitamin A supplements, bed nets to prevent malaria and de-worming medicine.

Despite substantial progress in immunizing more people over the past two decades, the Region

continues to face major challenges. Every day, more than 5500 infants are not fully immunized and an estimated 2.1 million children did not receive DTP3 vaccine in 2009. Moreover, a large number of child deaths due to pneumococcal disease and rotavirus diarrhoea can be prevented through vaccination with newly available vaccines. But introducing these vaccines into national immunization programmes will require additional financial commitment from countries and donors. Other regional challenges include eradicating polio from Afghanistan and Pakistan, and eliminating measles and maternal and neonatal tetanus.

For more information on Vaccination Week, visit www.emro.who.int/vpi/vwem or contact:

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