

23 April 2015 – Every year, the last week of April marks an important opportunity to remind the entire world of the importance of vaccines and immunization. More than 180 countries around the world, together with the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and other immunization partners, will be celebrating World Immunization Week during the week of the 24 to 30 April, 2015. This important initiative has been widely recognized and successfully celebrated by all the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region since 2010.

The global campaign theme for 2015 is “Close the immunization gap.” Unfortunately, each year, worldwide, around 22 million infants are still missing out on their basic vaccines; 3 million of these children are in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The theme of this year’s campaign “Close the immunization gap” is therefore a call for action for all individuals, communities and governments.

Through innovative and combined advocacy, education and communication activities and immunization services, World Immunization Week aims to:

- convince people that immunization saves lives;
- mobilize action to increase vaccination coverage with existing and newly available vaccines in underserved and marginalized communities;
- secure political will to increase support for immunization programmes.

In parallel to the global theme, countries in the Region have selected national themes according to their own priorities and national context. The initiative will be observed by various activities in countries; including national launching ceremonies, media campaigns, training, seminars and social mobilization events. During the week, many countries will be expanding vaccination services, including tracking unvaccinated people, extending operational hours, implementing large-scale vaccination campaigns and using child health days to deliver an integrated package of life-saving health interventions. In addition, some countries are planning to introduce new vaccines into their national programmes.

WHO encourages everyone to make sure that they and their children have received all required vaccines. Immunization is one of the most successful health interventions and prevents between an estimated two and three million deaths every year in all age groups from diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), and measles. From infants to senior citizens, immunization prevents debilitating illness, disability and death from vaccine-preventable

diseases. Moreover, the benefits of immunization are increasingly being extended to adolescents and adults, providing protection against life-threatening diseases, such as hepatitis, influenza, meningitis and cancers that occur in adulthood.

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