

20 November 2014 - The 18 November marked a major achievement in the history of immunization programmes in the Eastern Mediterranean Region following the introduction of the Haemophilus influenzae vaccine (Hib) in Islamic Republic of Iran, at a ceremony attended by the President of Islamic Republic of Iran Hassan Rouhani. The Hib vaccine is now included in all national immunization programmes in the Region and offered to infants free of charge. This remarkable achievement paves the way for the introduction of more new vaccines and for the targets of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) to be reached.

Hib vaccine protects children against pneumonia, a major cause of death of children under five, thus, it significantly contributes to achieving the targets of the Millennium Development Goal 4. Before the worldwide uptake of the vaccines, Hib bacteria is estimated to have caused at least 3 million cases of serious disease every year, as well as approximately 386 000 deaths globally.

In 2006, WHO recommended the use of the vaccine in all countries. Due to financial, operational and country-specific constraints, uptake of Hib vaccine in non-GAVI Alliance-supported middle-income countries showed a slower trend compared to GAVI-supported and high-income countries of the Region.

Countries are also expected to complete introduction of inactivated poliovirus vaccine throughout the Region by the end of 2015. WHO will continue to provide technical, operational and advocacy support to ensure the introduction of all necessary new and underutilized vaccines (i.e. pneumococcal, rotavirus and human papillomavirus) throughout the Region.



This important milestone was celebrated during the last day of the twenty-eighth intercountry meeting of regional EPI managers on 19 November 2014, in the presence of EPI managers of all countries, chairpersons of national immunization technical advisory groups, members of the regional technical advisory group, global partners: UNICEF, the GAVI Alliance, the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention and members of the WHO secretariat from headquarters and the Regional Office.

**Related links**

[Haemophilus influenzae type b \(Hib\)](#)

[IPV introduction, OPV withdrawal and routine immunization strengthening](#)

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