

Despite remarkable successes and progress in immunization, about 1.3 million infants and young children worldwide die every year from pneumococcal disease and rotavirus diarrhoea. Moreover, in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, an estimated 2 million people were unvaccinated in 2009.

Recent studies have demonstrated that the structural determinants and conditions of daily life responsible for unvaccinated children are primarily related to: 1) parental attitudes and knowledge, such as perceived benefits and threats, and 2) group pressures for or against vaccination; and family characteristics, such as education level, family size, income and occupation. Other contributing factors include communication, information and immunization system, such as health worker knowledge.

Accordingly, in response to both the remarkable opportunities and daunting challenges, the WHO Regional Office is leading a new initiative, Vaccination Week in the Eastern Mediterranean Region during the week of 24–30 April 2010.

This initiative is coinciding with similar endeavours in the WHO Regions of Americas and Europe. The goals and objectives of the initiative are in line with those set out in the Global Immunization Vision and Strategy 2006–2015, developed jointly with UNICEF, which calls for countries to improve communication and dissemination of information; increase community demand for immunization; and use a combination of innovative approaches and solutions to protect all people at risk against vaccine-preventable diseases.

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