

Despite the remarkable successes and progress in immunization, vaccine-preventable diseases contribute to 20%-25% of under-five deaths, which are currently estimated at 1.276 million in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. A large number of child deaths due to pneumococcal disease and rotavirus diarrhoea can be prevented through vaccination with newly available vaccines. Introducing these vaccines into national immunization programmes will require additional technical and financial commitment from countries and donors. Moreover, the Region continues to face daunting challenges, such as eradication of polio from Afghanistan and Pakistan, elimination of measles and maternal and neonatal tetanus and an estimated 2.2 million unimmunized children in 2009.

Structural determinants

Recent studies have demonstrated that the structural determinants and conditions of daily life responsible for unimmunized children are primarily related to parental attitudes and knowledge, such as perceived benefits and threats and group pressures for or against vaccination; communication and information, such as rumours and misinformation; immunization system, such as health care work attitudes and knowledge; and family characteristics, such as education level, family size, income and occupation.

Global vaccination weeks

Hence, in response to the remarkable opportunities and daunting challenges, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and partners are launching the second Vaccination Week in the Eastern Mediterranean during the week of 24–30 April 2011, which will coincide with the inaugural African and Western Pacific Vaccination Weeks, European Immunization Week and the Vaccination Week in the Americas. Vaccination Week is an annual Region-wide initiative celebrating and promoting immunization through advocacy, education and communication activities. Vaccination Week activities require collaboration among multiple private, non-government and government sectors such as education, youth, sports, police and culture.

Global Immunization Vision and Strategy

The goals and objectives of the initiative are in line with the regional slogan adopted in 2005, “*No child will die from vaccine-preventable disease*”

and those set out in the

Global Immunization Vision and Strategy (GIVS)

– developed jointly with UNICEF □ which calls for countries to improve communication and dissemination of information; increase community demand for immunization; ensure adequate and sustainable financing of national immunization programmes; define and recognize the roles, responsibilities and accountability of partners; and use a combination of innovative approaches

and solutions to protect all people at risk against vaccine-preventable diseases.

Launching of the first Vaccination Week in 2010 witnessed the unprecedented participation of all countries in the Region. The success of 2010 Vaccination Week was largely due to its flexibility, as countries designated their own national objectives based on priorities and evidence, and decided on which key activities to implement. The WHO Regional Office anticipates similar country commitment and leadership in 2011 with the involvement of key partners such as UNICEF, nongovernmental organizations, media and private sector.

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Saturday 17th of May 2025 10:29:48 AM