



European Immunization Week

Why is EIW important?

The widespread implementation of immunization programmes over the past 30 years has led to a dramatic reduction in illness and death due to vaccine-preventable diseases. The WHO European Region was certified polio-free in 2002 and measles cases in the Region were reduced by more than 90% between 1993 and 2007.

However, more needs to be done. Nearly 650 000 of the 10.7 million infants born each year in the European Region do not receive the complete three-dose series of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine by age one; and vulnerable populations exist in all countries. Ironically, the fact that immunization has made many infectious diseases rare or almost unheard of can lead to the opinion among parents and health professionals that vaccines are no longer necessary. This can make public confidence in vaccines susceptible to the influence of anti-vaccination groups and websites.

Strong political support for immunization must be maintained or the Region risks the re-emergence of highly contagious diseases, causing illness, disability and death, and placing a considerable burden on health care systems and parents. Recent outbreaks emphasize the regional responsibility we all share to keep vaccine-preventable diseases under control.

Immunization saves millions of lives every year and this public health success story must be sustained. Countries across the Region need to urgently provide accurate, balanced and understandable information about the risks of diseases and the benefits of vaccination. By acknowledging that every child deserves a healthy start in life, countries can use the momentum of European Immunization Week to increase awareness of the importance of immunization and to strengthen their immunization systems.

Who is involved?

European Immunization Week is a Region-wide initiative, led and coordinated by the WHO Regional Office for Europe in collaboration with key stakeholders in the Region. It takes place annually during April. The first EIW took place in 2005.

Countries from across the Region are actively engaged in European Immunization Week (EIW), using the initiative to highlight immunization through targeted advocacy and communication activities, as well as by immunizing high-risk groups.

A range of important immunization partners support this initiative and provide countries with assistance for the implementation of activities at the national and sub-national level, including associations of health professionals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations.

What is the objective?

The goal of European Immunization Week is to raise awareness of the importance of immunization and to increase vaccination coverage. A special focus is placed on activities to reach vulnerable populations. The slogan *Prevent. Protect. Immunize.* promotes the core message that vaccinating every child is vital to prevent diseases and to protect life. During EIW, each participating country implements activities to inform and engage key target audiences and to address the challenges regarding immunization.

Examples include:

For the general public, vulnerable groups, parents and caregivers:

- organizing events such as theatre performances, concerts, sports events or press conferences to highlight key messages;
- disseminating printed, video or other online information materials on the benefits of immunization;
- organizing outreach activities or catch-up immunization campaigns for vulnerable or underserved groups, such as prisoners, young people and refugees;
- organizing media or poster campaigns to inform the public about changes to the immunization programme, such as the shift to electronic registration of vaccination records;
- using social media channels to spread key messages, generate discussion and answer vaccine-related queries or concerns.

For health care professionals:

- organizing training sessions for relevant health care staff, locally or nationally;
- disseminating updated information materials to immunization-related personnel, providing them with guidance and tools to educate parents about the importance of immunization.

For policy and decision makers:

- arranging workshops with political decision-makers to discuss the challenges of immunization and to inform them of the benefits of immunization;
- developing information materials with relevant data and cost estimates to sensitize decision-makers to the issues and challenges related to immunization.

For the media:

- organizing press conferences to sensitize relevant media to key issues in relation to immunization and to generate positive media attention on the importance of vaccination;
- holding workshops to inform journalists and encourage balanced media coverage about immunization.

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