



Rubella Watch is an electronic publication disseminated bimonthly by the Immunization Unit of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization (WHO). *Rubella Watch* is a supplement to the *Immunization Newsletter* published by PAHO. The purpose is to provide you with the most up-to-date information and strategies which guide the rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) elimination initiative currently underway in the Americas. **The goal: eliminate rubella and CRS in the Region by 2010!**

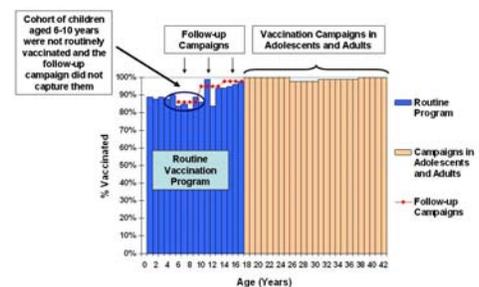
News from January – March 2008

Reaching the Unreached with Measles-Rubella Vaccination

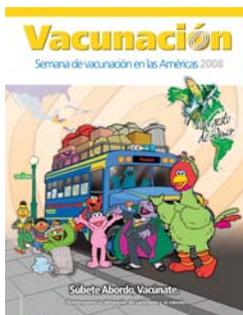
The most significant challenge to achieving rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) elimination, and maintaining measles elimination, is the inevitable accumulation of susceptible children over time. Although countries strive to achieve high immunization coverage through the routine program, pockets of unprotected cohorts remain. Therefore the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) recommends the provision of a second opportunity for measles-rubella (MR) vaccination through the implementation of periodic follow-up campaigns. This strategy aims to “reach the unreached,” or those individuals who never received vaccination services, as well as those who were vaccinated but failed to seroconvert.

It is vital that follow-up campaigns be of high quality and reach coverage >95%. Country experiences emphasize the importance of conducting a thorough analysis of protected cohorts to define populations susceptible to measles and rubella. Figure 1 demonstrates a hypothetical scenario where the cohort of children aged 6-10 years is not sufficiently protected due to low coverage in the routine program and in previous follow-up campaigns. PAHO strongly recommends that countries of the Americas continue the implementation of high-quality follow-up campaigns every 4 to 5 years, as a product of a cohort analysis and accumulation of susceptibles, reaching >95% coverage, to complement the routine immunization program.

Figure 1. Example of Analysis of Protected Cohorts



Vaccination Week in the Americas Contributes to Measles, Rubella, and CRS Elimination



Maintain measles and rubella elimination

Within the framework of Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA), Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama are conducting follow up campaigns with the measles-rubella (MR) vaccine to capitalize on the success of this initiative to “reach the unreached” and thereby prevent the buildup of susceptible individuals over time. Collectively, these campaigns will protect over 6 million children aged 1-6 years against measles and rubella and strengthen elimination efforts in the Americas. In El Salvador, children aged 12-18 years are being vaccinated as a result of the analysis of susceptible population cohorts.

Vaccination Week in the Americas is an initiative of the countries of the Americas to sustain political commitment for immunization programs and promote a culture of prevention. One of the principal objectives of VWA is to reduce inequities in health by targeting vulnerable

populations with vaccination activities, including indigenous communities and remote and border areas. In April 2008, VWA is celebrating its 6th anniversary, with a goal of reaching over 62 million children, adolescents, and adults.

Bold Social Communication Strategies Contribute to Rubella and CRS Elimination in the Americas

The rubella and CRS elimination initiative presents multiple challenges for social communication. Innovative communication strategies have adapted to the intricacies of mass rubella vaccination campaigns, which target men and women of different age groups that have not traditionally been the focus of national immunization programs, in order to ensure high vaccination coverage throughout the countries of the Region. These tactics have harnessed the inestimable support of sports leaders, in particular soccer players, to represent the face of vaccination campaigns in their respective countries, capitalizing on the popularity and reach of the sport to encourage male participation in vaccination activities. In addition, important opinion leaders have been involved in the initiative, such as the Haitian Pop singer Wyclef, who through the recent launching of a public service announcement in his native country promoted citizen participation in the campaign to vaccinate children and young people against measles and rubella.



Bold communication messages have the potential to effect behavior change among target populations of immunization activities, particularly when young people are the target of the intervention. For example, last November Chile conducted a mass vaccination campaign directed at men aged 19-29 years. The cornerstone of the country's creative communication strategy was the reaffirmation of what it means to be masculine, namely collective action and bravery. The latter was based on the concept of the male epic, and proved to be successful in motivating young people and adults to get vaccinated.

The use of different communications media (mass, interpersonal and nontraditional) increases the possibility of reaching a vast majority of the target population with energetic and appropriate communication messages. Countries have used mass media, such as television and radio, to blanket national communication pathways. They have also implemented nontraditional methods, such as the use of megaphones for promotion, or enlisted the help of churches at the regional/local level, to generate demand for vaccination activities and facilitate the work of vaccine brigades, particularly in rural or isolated areas.

Finally, the strategic targeting of campaign communication messages increases the probability of capturing the desired campaign demographic. In addition, each country schedules a "central day" as part of the campaign, providing a second opportunity to those who have not received the vaccine. From a social communication perspective, the "central day" presents an opportunity to reinforce campaign messages among community members with the continued support of the mass media, high level health authorities, and other opinion leaders.

Mexico Launches Mass Rubella Vaccination Campaign in 30 States

On 24 March, President Felipe Calderón launched a mass rubella elimination campaign to initiate the vaccination of more than 20 million individuals aged 19-29 years throughout 2,338 municipalities in 32 States. The target age group was identified through an analysis of rubella susceptible cohorts in 2006 and the results from a seroprevalence study within the framework of the 2006 National Health Survey. The campaign aims to achieve the ambitious goal of reaching coverage >98% in each municipality and age group through intense and indiscriminating MR vaccination. As of 9 May, the country has reached 99% coverage. The multisectoral campaign includes the support of the Secretary of Health of Mexico, the Institute of Social Security Serving the Workers of the State (ISSSTE), Integrated Family Development (DIF), Mexican Oils (PEMEX), Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS), the National Vaccination Board, the Secretary of Marine, and the Secretary of National Defense.



President Felipe Calderón (second from left) promises to eliminate rubella in México.

Upcoming Events

Meeting on the Documentation of Measles, Rubella, and Congenital Rubella Syndrome Elimination in Costa Rica

15-16 May 2008 – San José, Costa Rica

Expert Meeting on the Documentation of Measles, Rubella, and Congenital Rubella Syndrome Elimination in the Americas

July 2008 – Washington, DC

Rubella Vaccination Campaign (2nd Stage), Brazil

9 August- 20 September 2008 – Brazil

Rubella Vaccination Campaign (2nd Stage), Argentina

October 2008 – Argentina

If you would like to share meeting dates, other news, or make suggestions as to topics you would like us to discuss in this newsletter, please contact FCH-IM@paho.org

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