



*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!**

### Costa Rica Creates a National Commission for Measles, Rubella, and CRS Elimination

The president of Costa Rica, Oscar Árias Sánchez, signed an executive decree that creates a national expert commission to verify the elimination of measles, rubella, and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) in the country. Costa Rica became the first country of the Region to establish a national commission in response to Resolution CSP27.R2 of the 27th Pan American Sanitary Conference in October 2007. The Commission will be in charge of compiling and analyzing key information and preparing the final report that will be submitted by the Minister of Health to the International Expert Committee, which will verify whether the Region of the Americas has achieved the interruption of the endemic transmission of measles and rubella viruses.



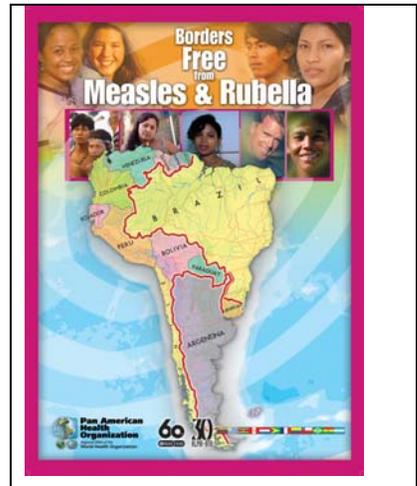
Photo: President Árias signs the executive decree accompanied by the Minister of Health, Dr. María Luisa Ávila-Aguero (right) and the Minister of the Presidency, Mr. Rodrigo Árias (left)

### Mexico: Another Country without Rubella

Completion of the goal to eliminate rubella and CRS from the Americas steadily approaches, as one more country is free from rubella. Nearly 21 million Mexicans aged 19-29 years were vaccinated during a rubella and CRS elimination campaign (March-May 2008), which achieved 98% coverage. The decisive leadership demonstrated by federal health authorities – such as the National Center for the Health of Infants and Adolescents (CENSIA) – state health authorities, health workers, and medical brigades, as well as the political commitment displayed by President Felipe Calderón, who chaired the launching activities, contributed to the success of the campaign. In addition, the collaborative efforts of various governmental entities, civil society, and opinion leaders, strengthened campaign promotion and social mobilization actions. In light of the continued endemic transmission of the measles virus in other regions of the world, all workers in the tourism sector were vaccinated (tourism “mop-up”), especially taxi drivers, airport personnel, and hotel and restaurant workers to prevent potential virus importations and limit secondary cases. Finally, delegates of the Ministry of Health are working with technical personnel in all states to conduct the vaccination coverage verification process by district. Positive results have been obtained to date.

## South American Borders Free from Measles and Rubella

During the rubella and CRS elimination campaigns that will take place in Argentina and Brazil in the upcoming months, countries of South America sharing a border with them will also vaccinate the population along the formal and informal border crossings. To this end, PAHO/WHO is supporting the development of the Project of Technical Cooperation among Countries (TCC), which represents a powerful communication mechanism between the two subregional integration systems of South America: the Andean Community of Nations (CAN) and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR). The TCC is also a reflection of the desire of the countries of the Region to increase integration and is aligned with the PAHO principles of Pan Americanism and solidarity. Taking into consideration that border populations move from country to country, there is a greater chance they will be excluded as they remain in neighboring countries during the vaccination campaigns conducted in their countries of origin. Furthermore, given that adult measles-rubella vaccination is not included in the routine program, and that the campaigns in Brazil and Argentina are the last adult rubella vaccination campaigns in the Region, the implementation of an integrated vaccination strategy along borders with neighboring countries is critical.



## Responding to Imported Measles Cases

Comprehensive and meticulous contact-tracing activities were conducted by Ecuadorian and Peruvian health authorities through home and workplaces visits in response to the confirmation of an imported measles case in Lima, Peru. More than 350 contacts of a 19 year-old Navy cadet from India were identified over a period of 21 days during April and May. Based on the epidemiology and clinical history of the case, the infectious period was from 27 April to 5 May. Health authorities in Port Bolivar, Ecuador identified all the places the patient frequented during this period, and the people whose immunity to measles was unknown at the time. In Lima, 128 contacts and 156 relatives of these contacts were identified. A total of 212 people were vaccinated, including personnel from the ship, health workers, people who helped transfer the case to the clinic, clinic patients, and family members who visited patients in the clinic where the case was treated. The health services issued alerts for the identification of suspect cases, particularly among groups hard to identify, such as sex workers, who may form part of the chain of transmission. No secondary cases were identified among the case contacts and/or health facilities. The D4 genotype was isolated.

## Upcoming Events

### Panel of Experts to Finalize the Regional Protocol for the Documentation of Measles, Rubella, and CRS Elimination

28-29 August 2008 – Washington, D.C.

### Measles and Rubella Laboratory Network Technical Consultation to Support Measles and Rubella Elimination

27 August 2008 - Washington, D.C.

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](mailto:FCH-IM@paho.org)

Editor: Dr. Carlos Castillo-Solórzano  
Associate Editors: Christina Marsigli and Pamela Bravo

