



# RUBELLA WATCH

Special supplement to the Immunization Newsletter

A news update from PAHO's Immunization Unit - Rubella and CRS Elimination Initiative

*Rubella Watch* is an electronic publication disseminated bimonthly by the Comprehensive Family Immunization Project 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 November-December 2008

### Only you are left-- Brazil rubella-free

In order to interrupt rubella virus circulation and attain high vaccination coverage to limit the number of secondary cases related to importations, immunization teams from the 27 Brazilian states have intensified vaccination activities to identify unvaccinated individuals and vaccinate them. To achieve this objective, they have drawn upon their creativity to develop innovative publicity messages to summon and persuade men and women, aged 20-39 years, to get vaccinated against rubella. The teams have intensified their efforts over the last few weeks in anticipation of the Christmas and New Year festivities. They are placing vaccination posts in areas where the public congregates (train stations, bus stops, markets, commercial centers) during peak hours and implementing door-to-door vaccination activities, particularly in rural areas or hard-to-reach urban zones. These increased activities will conclude on 5 January 2009 and are mainly conducted in the municipalities of large metropolitan areas, industrialized areas, and tourism areas.



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### Cuiabá gives its all to locate unvaccinated people

United we stand! In light of the confirmation of rubella cases in Cuiabá municipality, Mato Grosso state, a special team of immunization and surveillance professionals from the central level joined forces with municipality and state teams with the objective of vaccinating 100% of men and women aged 20-39 years. The special team, that continues to be supported by the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization, also counts on the active participation of mayors and state authorities to strengthen vaccination, surveillance, and communication activities. As of Epidemiological Week 49, 361 rubella cases were confirmed in the Mato Grosso state, 82 of them laboratory confirmed; of the total cases, 30 were reported by Cuiabá. The group aged 20-39 years was most affected by the rubella outbreak. It is also the target age group of the mass vaccination campaign. Since the last reported case occurred in EW 49\*, immediate intervention by the team was required to interrupt rubella virus circulation.



**Photo:** Vaccination team at Christmas party in Tocantins, Brazil.

\* Source: COVERCGDT/DEVEP/SVS/Ministry of Health.

## Encouraging Words from the Immunization Coordinator on the Brazil Rubella Campaign

As the Christmas and New Year festivities approach, the immunization coordinator of Salvador sent touching words of encouragement to all the state immunization coordinators to inspire them to continue vaccination efforts and reach all men and women aged 20-39 years to free Brazil from rubella and congenital rubella syndrome.

*"During 2008 we have learned a great deal from each and every driver, data recorder, vaccinator, supervisor, nurse, health worker, PAHO/WHO advisor, epidemiological surveillance coordinator, health surveillance coordinator, health district coordinator, health unit manager, immunization coordinator (district, municipal, state, national), health secretary (municipal and state), mayor, governor, Minister of Health, professionals from the General Coordinator of the National Immunization Program, as well as other key actors, too numerous to mention here but who, in truth, were key for the success of this experience we will never will forget. I thank you for your incredible work while implementing the Brazilian rubella campaign, which turned out to be such an impressive campaign, both from a technical and a logistical perspectives. I have been working with the immunization team since 1984, and I have just now learned how to conduct a vaccination campaign. It is as if I just have learned how to write. We will press on and I am certain that we can and will meet our targets and objectives. Hugs to all of you and victory for 2009!"*

Ana Rita Vasconcelos,  
Immunization Coordinator, Salvador



**Photo:** Vaccination in Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro, Rocinha is the biggest "favela" in population and territory in Latin America

## Meeting of the Panel of Experts on the Documentation and Verification of Measles, Rubella and CRS Elimination

A panel of measles, rubella, and CRS experts met in Washington, D.C. to discuss the essential data elements, including indicators, of the Plan of Action for the Documentation and Verification of Measles, Rubella, and CRS Elimination in the Americas. Principal outcomes from the meeting included the recommendation for a high-quality and highly-sensitive surveillance system to rapidly detect importations and secondary cases associated with importations. In addition, the experts emphasized the importance of obtaining high levels of population immunity to prevent the reestablishment of endemic measles and rubella virus circulation in the Region. To this end, an analysis of cohorts protected against measles and rubella must be conducted in each country, based on the vaccination strategies implemented to date. Furthermore, experts highlighted the importance of the evolution of National Immunization Programs to maintain elimination. Experts recommended that lessons learned from the global eradication of smallpox and the regional elimination of polio be considered to better understand what is required for the disease elimination process.

## Measles in the Post –elimination Era: Preparation for a Rapid Response

The world is changing. Volatile urban sprawl, widespread globalization, exploitation and degradation of the environment and growing resistance of microorganisms to available drugs have contributed to changes in disease dynamics, and in the response for effective disease control. Within this context, expert epidemiologists and epidemic rapid response technical personnel met in Panama City, Panama, in November to determine how the Americas should respond to those diseases that constitute a threat to international public health, one of them being measles, a disease that has been eliminated in the Americas.

Given that the measles virus continues to circulate in other Regions of the world, this Region faces a constant risk of importation. Several outbreaks resulting from importations have occurred in the last five years, with limited numbers of secondary cases to importation. As a result, experts underscored the importance that outbreak control measures adhere to the paradigm shift in outbreak response, namely:

- from control and response measures within country borders, to control the source of infection, which often implies intervening in other countries and/or regions;
- from following pre-established control measures to a rapid response in accordance with specific outbreak characteristics.

This change in the response paradigm implies intense preparation and anticipated organization on behalf of the countries, and the preparation of rapid response plans for measles outbreak control. The experts also emphasized the need for high measles and rubella vaccination coverage as well as a high-quality and sensitive surveillance system that allows for the early detection of every imported case and the appearance of possible secondary cases to importation.



**Photo:** Health worker talks with crew member from the ship "Berge Natong" during a measles outbreak epidemiological investigation in Peru

## Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



The Immunization Unit of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) would like to thank all of the *Rubella Watch* readers for their continuous efforts in the rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) elimination initiative, wishing you all a **Merry Christmas and Prosperous New Year!**

**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  
Guest Editor: Dr. Jorge Medrano

