



Third Regional Meeting to Share Lessons Learned in the Development and Implementation of Electronic Immunization Registries

Gabriela Felix, Marcela Contreras and Martha Velandia

Location	San Jose, Costa Rica
Dates	4 – 6 April 2016
Participants	Representatives from 20 countries of the Americas, three from African countries (Gambia, Tanzania and Zambia), World Health Organization (WHO), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, PATH and both the United States' and European Union's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
Purpose	To share lessons on the planning, development and implementation of Electronic Immunization Registries (EIRs), as well as to socialize a draft document on the planning, design, development and implementation of a national EIR.

During this two and a half day meeting, participants discussed and shared their experiences and lessons learned regarding the development and implementation of EIRs. Furthermore, the meeting participants reviewed the proposed contents of a draft document under development by PAHO's Improving Data Quality for Immunization (IDQi) Project.

Besides sharing experiences and discussing needed EIR functionalities, different EIR scopes and options for their development and implementation, meeting participants focused on making EIRs sustainable and useful to improve Immunization Program performance and efficiency, as well as a tool for better accountability. Issues regarding governance, legal frameworks, financial and human resources as well as how EIR and other immunization information systems fit into the countries' overarching eHealth strategies were emphasized.



*Participants at the Third Regional Meeting to Share Lessons Learned in the Development and Implementation of Electronic Immunization Registries, Costa Rica, April 2016.
Photo credit: PAHO*

As mentioned in the objectives, PAHO is developing a practical guide on the planning, design, development and implementation of an EIR. This document responds to recommendations and regional mandates that support adopting information and communication technologies in health, and particularly EIRs and is drawing from successful experiences and lessons learned from countries of the Region. To this end, this third regional meeting to share experiences was very useful.



ProVac Regional Workshop on the Use of Economic Evidence for Vaccine Decision-Making: the Case of Meningococcal Vaccination

Gabriela Felix Garcia and Cara Janusz

Location	San Jose, Costa Rica
Dates	6 – 8 April 2016
Participants	Countries from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), World Health Organization (WHO), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, PATH, United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US-CDC), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Agence de Médecine Préventive (AMP), Harvard School of Public Health, Rutgers University School of Public Health, Sabin Vaccine Institute, and ProVac Centers of Excellence (Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Universidad de Cartagena and IECS).
Purpose	The workshop aimed to provide national public health experts with training on tools and methods to estimate the impact, costs and cost-effectiveness of vaccines in order to guide decision makers in developing evidence-based immunization policies. The workshop will feature case examples for meningococcal vaccination.

This two-and-a-half day workshop brought together participants from the Member States from PAHO. They were joined by global experts on decision science and evidence-based policy-making for immunization programs from the WHO's headquarters, AMP, the US CDC, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, PATH and various academic institutions that provide expert guidance to PAHO's ProVac Initiative.

The primary aim of the workshop was to provide national public health experts with training on tools and methods to estimate the impact, costs and cost-effectiveness of vaccines in order to guide decision-makers in developing evidence-based immunization policies.

It also served as the launching venue for three new ProVac tools (UNIVAC, COSTVAC and COSTCARE), as well as the presentation of the soon to be available ProVac eToolKit.



Re-Introduction of the Hepatitis B Vaccine among Newborns in St. Kitts and Nevis: From Evidence to Action

Eulynis Brown, Ermine Jeffers, Retna Walwyn Brown and Patrick Martin, Ministry of Health, St Kitts and Nevis; Patrice Lawrence-Williams, PAHO/OECC

In 1985, a Hepatitis B sero-prevalence study conducted in St. Kitts and Nevis revealed high prevalence rates of Hepatitis B infection (HBV) with the highest risk of acquiring the infection occurring during the perinatal period and in early school years.

In response, the government of St. Kitts and Nevis sought to introduce a plasma-derived Hepatitis B vaccine to infants in 1988. The program was discontinued because of public concerns about the risks of a plasma-derived product.

A recombinant Hepatitis B vaccine was successfully introduced to infants in 2000, as part of a pentavalent combination at ages 2, 4 and 6 months as recommended. The Ministry of Health, however, was still interested in ascertaining the national prevalence of Hepatitis B infection.

In 2011, the Ministry of Health collaborated with the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to conduct a sero-prevalence study to assess the response to the vaccine. The antenatal population was selected (n=317) since perinatal transmission and its sequelae are associated with significant morbidity and mortality in infants. The study found 3.2% of the pregnant women positive for HBsAg, and 52.4% of the pregnant women tested negative for anti-HBs.

These findings informed changes to the immunization policy and schedule. In October 2015, a birth dose of recombinant Hepatitis B vaccine was re-introduced with inoculation given within 24 hours of birth. This is in-keeping with the PAHO/WHO's 2009 recommendations for a Hepatitis B vaccination schedule in an intermediate/moderate endemic zone.

Infants are now given the newborn dose in addition to the 3- dose pentavalent combination.

At the end of 2015, 122 newborns were already vaccinated with 100% acceptance of the vaccine. Successful implementation may be attributed to longstanding public confidence in and support for the national vaccination program, a robust communication strategy and unequivocal political support.



Regional Workshop for Strengthening Capacities for Measuring, Analysis and Monitoring of Social Inequalities in Immunizations

Martha Velandia, Oscar Mujica, Marcela Contreras, Monica Gibbons and Hannah Kurtis

Location	Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
Dates	9-11 March 2016
Participants	Technical staff from the Ministries of Health of Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Peru, as well as facilitators from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).
Purpose	This workshop was organized by PAHO as a collaborative effort between the Special Program on Sustainable Development and Health Equity (SDE) and the Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit (IM), in order to strengthen the analytical capacities of countries in the measurement of inequalities in immunization coverage, particularly those related to socioeconomic indicators.

During the three-day workshop, presentations covered the concepts of inequalities in health and immunizations, the Social Determinants of Health and how to utilize specific metrics to measure inequalities in coverage at the subnational level using equity stratifiers.

Participants were asked to bring their own country databases to the workshop to do their own analysis. As part of the workshop agenda, participants had the opportunity to gain hands-on experience carrying out the different types of inequality analyses that were presented.



Participants at the Regional Workshop for Strengthening Capacities for Measuring, Analysis and Monitoring of Social Inequalities in Immunizations, Dominican Republic, March 2016.

During the workshop, facilitators emphasized that in addition to increasing rates of national vaccination coverage, countries also need to be cognizant of the need to reduce coverage inequalities at the subnational level. Looking at the relationship between vaccination coverage and socioeconomic indicators can be a key tool to help inform the targeted strategies for national immunization programs.

At the conclusion of the workshop, participants agreed to continue working on this area and extend this work to other countries in the Region.



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(GLOBAL IMMUNIZATION NEWSLETTER)

Paraguay Celebrates the Switch to bOPV

Pan American Health Organization-Paraguay

At exactly 10:00 am on April 18th, Paraguay became the first country in the Americas to complete the “switch.” At this time all health centers across Paraguay withdrew tOPV and introduced bOPV into the national vaccination schedule.

In a colorful event at the Maternity Hospital of Loma Pytá, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare celebrated the switch and performed a symbolic withdrawal of tOPV and introduction of bOPV.

At this ceremony, health authorities of the highest level, along with members of the Immunization Committee, representatives of civil society organizations, military, police, prestigious national athletes, and health care workers, welcomed bOPV, which together with the injectable vaccine polio (IPV), marks the final phase of polio eradication, a disease that for centuries was the cause of infant mortality and severe disability in survivors. To the sound of sirens, military marches and church bells, Alma Gamarra, a little girl one year and nine months old, received the last dose of tOPV while Adrian Joshua Balmaceda Solis, four months old, received the first dose of bOPV from the Minister of Health, Dr. Antonio Barrios.

During the ceremony, Dr. Carlos Castillo Solorzano, the PAHO/WHO Representative in Paraguay, said: "This year could be the last case of polio worldwide, a historic milestone and legacy for future generations. The previous generation achieved smallpox eradication and now we will achieve polio eradication. The world's future looks great. There will be no more inequities; we will eradicate polio, measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome."

At another point Castillo Solorzano said: "This is a time to celebrate the journey, to thank all health workers who contributed to this cause, but also to decisively commit to maintaining the commitment to have a country free of vaccine-preventable diseases."



Paraguay celebrating the Switch to bOPV.
Photo credit: PAHO-PAR.



Alma Gamarra, 1 year and 9 months, received the last dose of tOPV in Paraguay. Photo credit: PAHO-PAR.



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Finally he said, "Today I also want to celebrate because I am deeply honored to have worked on polio eradication and to have been a part of vaccination efforts in the Americas. The feeling of helping eradicate a disease that causes child paralysis is indescribable. It is quite likely that we will be the last generation to have seen the aftermath of this terrible disease. Images linger in my memory of children with iron legs suffering from polio."



Adrián Josué Balmaceda Solís, 4 months, received the first dose of bOPV in Paraguay. Photo credit: PAHO-PAR.

Juan Cardozo: The Last Case of Polio in Paraguay

Pan American Health Organization-Paraguay

Juan Cardozo, a survivor of the last case of Polio in Paraguay gave a testimony at the Switch ceremony on 18 April. During his testimony, Cardozo said: "I am a survivor of polio and the last case of this terrible disease that struck our country in 1985, when I was barely a year old. Now I have become a health care worker, I have a degree in nursing and although I have physical limitations as a consequence from polio, I have dedicated myself to teach and show the people where I live, that prevention is better than a cure. Prevention through vaccination should be the standard that all must extol, it has not only helped us get to where we are now, but just imagine what we are achieving now, eliminating from this world a virus that not only killed, but left a generation of cripples."



Juan Cardozo speaks at Paraguay's Switch ceremony as the last case of polio in the country. Photo Credit: Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, Paraguay.

This moving testimony from a polio survivor shows us how overcoming a potentially debilitating illness can inspire someone to aid in the prevention and elimination of all vaccine-preventable diseases.



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More than 60 Million People Set to Benefit from Vaccines during Vaccination Week in the Americas

Communications Unit and Immunization Unit – Pan American Health Organization

As the globe celebrates the 5th anniversary of World Immunization Week (WIW), the Americas will also be commemorating its 14th year of Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA), April 23-30th. This year, countries and territories throughout the Western Hemisphere will reach out to around 60 million children and adults during VWA delivering vaccines against diseases, including rubella, measles, diphtheria, mumps, whooping cough, neonatal tetanus, influenza, yellow fever, diarrhea caused by rotavirus, bacterial pneumonia, and human papilloma virus (HPV), among others.



PSA: Usain Bolt — Go for the Gold, Get Vaccinated - <https://youtu.be/x2KYu72TIEk>

This year's VWA also coincides with the global switch from the trivalent oral polio vaccine to the bivalent oral polio vaccine, and many countries are combining this activity within the framework of Vaccination Week. Additionally, more than 21 countries and territories have reported plans to integrate activities with other health interventions; a particular focus this year in several countries will be on vector control activities to prevent or control ongoing outbreaks of Zika, Dengue and Chikungunya.



Group promoting Vaccination Week in the Americas in Peru.
Photo Credit: Adolfo Abel Villaba Dias.



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The regional launch for this year's Vaccination Week in the Americas will take place in Kingston, Jamaica on April 23rd, with participation from PAHO Director Carissa F. Etienne, Jamaican National Authorities, and partner agencies, followed by national and multinational launch events throughout the region.

Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt, who holds six Olympic gold medals and 11 world championships, is supporting this year's Vaccination Week, appearing in PAHO-produced promotional messages, such as posters, social media messages, and in a public service announcement (PSA), in which he tells viewers, "I'm up to date on my vaccines. Are you?"



PAHO staff showing their support for VWA 2016.
Photo Credit: David Spitz.



PSA from Dr. Carissa F. Etienne, PAHO Director. Available at <http://bit.ly/1MYZyNT>

PAHO is also doing a social media campaign using the #GetVax and #GoForTheGold hashtags to encourage people to take photos holding #GetVax signs and post them to social media or to PAHO's website. A series of tweet chats are also being held at the regional level and in countries to promote Vaccination Week and answer questions on vaccination.

For more information on VWA, visit www.paho.org/vwa.