

## Why is Vaccination Important for Global Health?

Vaccination programs have reduced the incidence of a large number of dangerous infectious diseases (such as polio, measles, mumps, whooping cough and diphtheria) in both developed and developing countries. The programs must be continually implemented, as communicable diseases quickly flare up if vaccination coverage is reduced. One example of this is measles.

Effective and safe vaccines, which protect against several serious diseases, are available all over the world. Today, there are still 19.4 million unvaccinated and under-vaccinated children in the world (WHO, 2020a). WHO highlights the importance of immunization as a top global health investment priority and urges all countries to promote the use of vaccines to protect people of all ages against disease. Approximately 20 vaccines are currently in use.

Every child has the right to live free from vaccine-preventable diseases, but these diseases still pose significant threats in the WHO European Region. Consequently, strengthening immunization remains vital. Immunization has brought about a remarkable reduction in child mortality in the WHO European Region over the past few decades. Today, nine of every 10 children in the region receive at least a basic set of vaccinations during infancy and, as a result, they lead healthier, more productive lives.

## The Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP) and the European Vaccine Action Plan (EVAP)

The Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP) is a roadmap to prevent millions of deaths through more equitable access to vaccines by 2020. To date, progress towards the GVAP targets is off track. (WHO, 2020b). WHO/Europe's work in the area of vaccines and vaccination is guided by the European Vaccine Action Plan (EVAP). WHO/Europe works with Member States and partners to achieve the EVAP's major goals, including strengthening and achieving financial sustainability of national immunization programs, eliminating measles and rubella, and maintaining the poliomyelitis-free status of the European Region (WHO, 2020c).

## Vaccine hesitancy - a threat to global health

WHO (2020d) has recorded ten threats to global health in 2019. Vaccine hesitancy is one of them. The other threats are, for example, the global influenza pandemic, Ebola, HIV, dengue and weak primary health care. Vaccine hesitancy has become a growing concern, not least in the WHO European Region. Vaccine hesitancy – the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines – threatens to reverse the progress made in tackling vaccine-preventable diseases.

The anti-vaccination movement is growing also in Europe. In developed countries, where effective vaccination programs have significantly reduced or even eradicated diseases, people who are critical of vaccinations or refuse them entirely have become louder, trying to get publicity for their cause. They actively participate in Internet discussion groups and in the media. Measles, for example, has seen a 30% increase in cases globally. The reasons for this rise are complex, and not all the cases are due to vaccine hesitancy. However, some countries that were close to eliminating the disease have seen a resurgence.

The reasons why people choose not to vaccinate are complex. They include factors such as complacency, convenience and confidence. Health care workers, especially those in communities, remain the most trusted advisors and influencers of vaccination decisions, and they must be supported to provide trusted, credible information on vaccines. Read more in section “Anti-vaccination groups and clients who hesitate to take vaccines”.

## References

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