

Summary report on the

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# Second regional meeting on strengthening vaccine pharmacovigilance: strengthening vaccine safety communication capacities

Hammamet, Tunisia  
2–4 July 2013



World Health  
Organization

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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## **1. Introduction**

In 2012, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean initiated an annual regional meeting on strengthening vaccine pharmacovigilance in Eastern Mediterranean Region. This meeting is intended as a platform for sharing experiences from all countries in the Region and for discussing vaccine safety issues that countries may encounter and an opportunity for training at regional level on specific topics related to vaccine safety.

In 2013, the topic to be addressed by the meeting was vaccine safety communication, which was highlighted as a key area for capacity-building by the global vaccine safety planning group meeting of November 2012. Vaccine safety communication is one of the eight strategic objectives of the global vaccine safety blueprint project.

The second regional meeting for strengthening the vaccine pharmacovigilance was held in Hammamet, Tunisia on 2–4 July 2013. The main objective of the meeting was to strengthen the capacity of regulators and EPI focal persons in dealing with vaccine risk communication. The meeting aimed to provide knowledge and information on how to better communicate with regard to routine immunization, vaccination campaigns and introduction of new vaccines into immunization programmes and in the case of vaccine crisis or rumours.

The meeting was an initiative of WHO to strengthen vaccine safety communication capacities in countries, and the event would be used as a platform to pilot-test training on vaccine safety communications and to further develop guidance on vaccine safety risk communication to be used according to need at country level and in other WHO regions.

The meeting was attended by 34 participants from 17 countries of the Region who are dealing with immunization and vaccine pharmacovigilance, as well as WHO staff working on immunization programmes. It was opened by Dr Guido Sabatinelli, WHO Representative for Tunisia.

## **2. Summary of proceedings**

Different experts in the field of vaccine safety communication were invited from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, from UNICEF, from the Department of Pediatrics, Jordan University Hospital, and from WHO headquarters and Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. In addition, a journalist with deep expertise in the area of vaccine safety communication co-facilitated the meeting.

A number of presentations were made on the communication about vaccines, on the experience of Jordan in the area of vaccine safety communication, on single overarching communication outcome, on the communication in case of routine immunization and especially during the introduction of new vaccines, such as the example of pentavalent vaccine in India, and on communications during vaccination campaigns, in particular the experience of UNICEF with polio vaccination campaigns in India. Vaccine risk communication and vaccine safety crises as well as how to develop a risk communication strategy were discussed. Key messages for working with the media and how to handle the difficult questions as well as the components and development of a communication plan and particularly a crisis communication plan were also presented and widely debated. Participants shared the difficulties and concerns that faced during influenza pandemic situation or with some vaccines such as measles vaccine or pentavalent vaccine.

All topics presented were followed by workgroup sessions with conducting case studies and examples to be discussed and with roleplaying and interview situations replicating real situations faced with adverse events following immunization, including handling difficult situations and communicating with parents in the case of a serious adverse event following the immunization of a child.

A participant handbook on communication training programmes for staff in English and French versions that was developed by WHO was distributed to the participants. Following the workshop, WHO staff and invited experts met to discuss the lessons learnt, follow-up actions for the improvement of the presentations that will be used in the future as training materials and to develop guidance document on vaccine safety communications.

### **3. Future steps**

At the end of the meeting, participants agreed to follow up on assessing the implementation status of communication plans in their institutions. Facilitators jointly produced a checklist to be used as a basis for this assessment. The meeting ended with an evaluation in which the participants expressed the need to have more practical examples in the interview and roleplay exercises, which were regarded as particularly helpful. French speaking countries asked for the same training to be conducted in French. The meeting recommended that WHO headquarters with the contribution of the facilitators review all presentations and develop a full training package including a training guide on vaccine safety communication as well as a facilitator's manual for vaccine safety communication training. The Regional Office would follow up the development of communication plans for

vaccine safety by the participating countries and explore further needs for vaccine safety communications in the Region.





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