

**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

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**ACHIEVING THE GOALS OF THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN VACCINE ACTION
PLAN: PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR ACCELERATION**

Objectives of the event

The objectives of the event are to:

- update Member States on progress in achieving regional immunization goals outlined in the *Eastern Mediterranean Vaccine Action Plan 2016–2020: a framework for implementation of the Global Vaccine Action Plan (EMVAP)*;
- discuss challenges to achieving regional immunization goals and identify opportunities for further progress;
- reach agreement on development of a plan of key activities to be supported by Member States to achieve regional immunization goals by 2020.

Background

Immunization is one of the safest, most efficacious and cost-effective public health interventions in history. Immunization reduces morbidity and mortality from deadly childhood diseases and its role in protecting people of all ages against diseases keeps expanding. It has an essential role to play in contributing to achievement of the three strategic priorities of *WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW 13)* – achieving universal health coverage, addressing health emergencies and promoting healthier populations.

The EMVAP was endorsed in 2015 in resolution EM/RC62/R.1 by the 62nd session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean. It provides guidance on the prevention and control of vaccine-preventable diseases during 2016–2020 and beyond, taking into account the specific needs and challenges of Member States of WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region. EMVAP envisions a Region in which all individuals enjoy lives free from vaccine-preventable diseases, reflecting the joint commitment of Member States, partners and stakeholders to a long-term collective effort towards achieving the goals of the action plan: 1) Attain interruption of wild poliovirus transmission and sustain polio-free status; 2) Meet regional routine vaccination coverage targets at all administrative levels (at least 90% DTP3 coverage at national level and at least 80% coverage in every district); 3) Meet regional elimination and control targets for vaccine-preventable diseases (measles and neonatal tetanus elimination and hepatitis B control); and 4) Introduce new and underutilized vaccines of regional and national priority.

Countries of the Region are at different stages in their progress towards achieving regional immunization goals. While 14 countries have achieved and sustained 90% routine DTP3 vaccination coverage, eight have DTP3 coverage of less than 80% at the national level. Around 2.9 million children did not receive their third dose of DTP vaccine in 2018, with the vast majority of these children living in countries affected by acute or protracted emergencies. Eight countries reported a measles incidence of less than one per million in 2018. Measles elimination was verified in two countries and rubella elimination was verified in three countries, while the remaining

countries continued to experience a vicious circle of outbreaks, which resulted from relatively low routine vaccination coverage. Four countries of the Region, in addition to remaining parts of Pakistan, have yet to achieve maternal and neonatal tetanus elimination. Regarding the introduction of new vaccines, while Gavi-supported countries and high-income countries have achieved remarkable success, middle-income countries in the Region still struggle to introduce life-saving but expensive vaccines. Poliomyelitis is still endemic in two countries of the Region, and improving routine immunization coverage is necessary to achieve and sustain polio-free status.

Challenges in the Region

Immunization programmes face several challenges in scaling up activities to achieve regional immunization goals, which include:

- security-compromised and health emergency situations in low coverage countries;
- low visibility of elimination and control goals for vaccine-preventable diseases and lack of government commitment to achieving these goals in many countries;
- weak managerial capacity in immunization programmes;
- relatively low budgetary allocations for immunization programmes; and
- inadequate financial resources to meet the evolving demands of the Expanded Programme on Immunization, especially for the introduction of new vaccines and implementing the measles elimination strategy.

As we approach the end of the duration of EMVAP in 2020, there is a need to discuss the current situation of immunization programmes, progress made in achieving the goals of the action plan and the challenges to, and opportunities for, achieving these goals, and to identify priority actions to scale up immunization programmes, ensure the sustainability of gains and reach vaccine-preventable disease elimination and control targets to progress towards universal health coverage and the goals of the GPW 13.

Expected outcomes

- Member States are updated on progress in achieving regional immunization goals, challenges are discussed and opportunities for further progress identified.
- Agreement reached on development of a plan of key activities to be supported by Member States to achieve regional immunization goals by 2020.