



European Immunization Week 2008 Highlights



From 21 to 27 April 2008, the third annual European Immunization Week (EIW) took place. Thirty-two countries, covering three-quarters of the Region's population, participated in the initiative. Member States carried out an impressive range of advocacy activities to raise awareness of the importance of immunization children. All countries reported that they believed that EIW would have effect on vaccination uptake in future, and most of them indicated they would participate in EIW in 2009. This evaluation provides an overview of the Week and its key outcomes.

32 participating countries in EIW 2008: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom and Uzbekistan

Member States' activities

In 2008, the range of EIW activities across the European Region varied widely, from public awareness campaigns through exhibitions (Belarus, France), concerts (Albania), quizzes and contests (Hungary), to the presentation of new immunization guidelines and the introduction of new vaccines and/or vaccination schedules (Ireland). The public could obtain information about immunization through web sites and special hotlines, and printed flyers and posters with the EIW logo and slogan were widely used to bring attention to the initiative. Several countries organized outreach activities, including door-to-door visits to inform people and check their vaccine status or even administer vaccinations (Georgia, Romania and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

With the 2010 measles elimination goal in mind, Germany organized a measles elimination workshop as part of their EIW activities. Belgium also focused on measles vaccination by targeting young adolescents with a YouTube video. Other diseases/infections specifically addressed included rubella (Belarus), diphtheria (Azerbaijan), Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) (Turkey), hepatitis B (France) and the human papilloma virus (Slovenia).

A variety of target groups was reached during the Week. Several countries held workshops or conferences for health care workers (Croatia, Latvia), and many engaged politicians along with other key policy-makers through events such as parliamentary seminars and roundtable discussions (Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, United Kingdom). Parents were informed about immunization through discussion evenings and lectures (Slovakia) as well as through activities at primary health clinics and maternity hospitals (Turkmenistan). Kindergartens and primary and secondary schools were also targeted during the week (Malta, Poland, Serbia).

About half of the participating countries focused on hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups such as prisoners (Greece), abandoned children (Russian Federation), religious objectors (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan), as well as minority communities, including migrants (Cyprus) and the Roma population, which was targeted in several countries.

Some countries identified the media as a target group due to its ability to influence attitudes and create an understanding of the effectiveness and safety of vaccination. Activities to stimulate balanced and positive media coverage about immunization included workshops and briefings for the media (Armenia) and contests for journalists to write about immunization (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan). Most countries sent out press releases or organized press events. Media coverage of EIW resulted in a substantial number of articles as well as essays and special TV debates and programmes about immunization.

Several key stakeholders and partners were involved in EIW activities at the national level. UNICEF assisted at least eight countries with external communication activities and the development of information materials, and the International Federation of Red Crescent/Red Cross Societies (IFRC) engaged in EIW activities at the country level. Other partners included medical associations and NGOs for Roma populations, homeless children and health education. In Poland, the EIW activities were initiated by civil society. Some countries involved private donors (e.g. to arrange for presents for children after vaccinations and the distribution of materials).



Key outcomes of European Immunization Week 2008

The major issues regarding immunization that were identified during the planning process in the participating countries concerned health care providers, parents and caretakers and included confusion due to mixed messages about the safety and necessity of immunization; lack of knowledge about immunization and a distrust in vaccines. Other important barriers reported by participating countries were the difficulty in reaching marginalized population groups and unbalanced media coverage regarding immunization.

About half of the countries reported that EIW contributed to a change in awareness, attitude or behaviour of their target groups. The changes reported most were increased awareness about immunization among health care workers and parents/caregivers. Several countries reported that after EIW an increased number of health care workers believed giving guidance about immunization is a top priority, and that more parents sought vaccination in a health care facility or planned to have their children immunized. Furthermore, increased and more positive/balanced media coverage regarding immunization was seen in many countries. Changes at the decision-making level included plans to develop national action plans regarding immunization, especially for hard-to-reach groups. Some countries reported that EIW had led to increased financial support for immunization or that this was planned to be discussed after EIW.

EIW 2008 activities in numbers

Hundreds of thousands of information materials, posters and flyers were developed and distributed to inform people about the importance of immunization. In addition, the public could search information about immunization through new web sites that were launched, and some countries even opened special immunization hotlines, answering over **35 000** phone calls.

At **3000** schools in the Region special lessons were given about immunization. Over **30 000** trainings were organized for health professionals and other groups, including teachers and parents and people of vulnerable groups. Furthermore over **2000** workshops, technical meetings and round-table discussions were held across the Region.

Also, **dozens** of sport events, theatre shows, exhibitions and similar activities as well as competitions, including drawing contests, a competition for journalists, and quizzes for medical workers, were organized during the week.

Door-to-door distribution of information about immunization reached over **half a million** people. Other outreach activities resulted in over **143 000** updated immunization cards, and during the week almost **2 million** supplementary vaccinations were administered.



Regional launch event

To celebrate the third European Immunization Week, WHO Regional Director for Europe, Dr Marc Danzon, hosted Her Royal Highness (HRH) Crown Princess Mary of Denmark in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on 23 April 2008 at a launching ceremony on behalf of all participating countries. Together with the First Lady of Slovenia and other speakers, they addressed members of the diplomatic corps, health professionals and the mass media, stressing the importance of immunization in the European Region and encouraging Member States to continue their work to strengthen immunization systems and take part in European Immunization Week.

Dr Danzon underlined the successes achieved through immunization, such as the eradication of smallpox worldwide and the elimination of poliomyelitis in the Region. Unfortunately, as he said, immunization seems to have become a victim of its success. Since people do not remember the tragic consequences of vaccine-preventable diseases, they sometimes fear the vaccine more than the disease. Thus, it is important to maintain the struggle against infectious diseases, with immunization as a primary tool. This benefits everyone, as immunized people protect not only their own health but also that of others.



"No child should suffer from illness, a lifelong disability or die from vaccine-preventable diseases."

"It is the right of every child to grow up healthy and to be vaccinated against these diseases, which can so easily be controlled. I hope that the countries within the Region will act quickly and effectively to ensure that children and adults, especially those in vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups, have access to immunization and basic health services."

"I wish you and the Region's Member States every success in achieving that goal."

HRH Crown Princess Mary of Denmark at the Regional launch of European Immunization Week 2008, in Slovenia

European Immunization Week 2008: Regional indicators

As a result of a planning meeting in September 2007 with participating countries, indicators for each evaluation level were developed. Below, the outcomes are briefly presented. Most indicators were not met. In the general evaluation, 26 countries reported to have identified key target groups for EIW 2008. Only 23 out of the 32 participating countries reported back on the regional indicators in the supplementary evaluation.

Was the information collected adequate to prepare for the initiative?

22 countries identified key barriers regarding immunization during the planning process for EIW 2008. This was mainly done on the basis of immunization coverage data and consultations with experts.

Indicator: At least 50% of the participating countries performed target group surveys to identify their defined target group's knowledge or attitudes towards immunization.

Nine countries reported to have done this (28%).

Indicator: At least 50% of the participating countries compared before and after results regarding the knowledge, attitudes or behaviour of their defined target groups.

Seven countries reported to have done this (22%).

Was the initiative implemented according to the plan?

The Regional Office encouraged all participating countries to start the planning of their activities for European Immunization Week by December 2007. Eleven countries had started their planning by that date; however, many countries started their planning only in February 2008 or later.

Indicator: At least 50% of the participating countries established a working group by December 2007.

EIW working groups were established in general in January and February 2008. Seven countries reported to have done this by December 2007 (22%).

Indicator: At least 50% of the participating countries involved sub-national levels in the planning by December 2007.

Most countries started involving sub-national levels in January 2008 or later. Five countries reported to have done this by December 2007 (16%).

Indicator: At least 50% of the participating countries developed a plan of action by December 2007.

Plans of action – the main planning document used for EIW planning in the countries – were developed at the national or sub-national level or both, varying per country, and often ready and approved in February 2008 or before (50%). Four countries reported to have had their plan of action ready by December 2007 (13%). In most countries the plan of action for EIW was fully implemented.

Did the initiative change the attitudes or behaviour of the target groups?

Nineteen countries reported to have set specific criteria or indicators for success before EIW. These primarily consisted of the indicators set by the Regional Office. Fourteen countries collected information to assess possible changes in awareness, attitude or behaviour of the target groups after EIW.

About half of all participating countries reported that EIW contributed to a change in awareness, attitude or behaviour of their target groups, but many could not say whether any changes had taken place yet. The reported changes occurred mostly among health professionals, the media, and parents/caregivers (both in the general population as well as hard-to-reach groups). Changes among decision-makers (both at national and sub-national level) and adolescents were reported to a lesser extent.

Indicator: Knowledge: The number of defined target groups deeming that they know why immunization is important increased by at least 20% compared to representatives of the same target group before EIW.

Five countries reported back, with an average of a 31% increase.

Indicator: Attitude: The number of defined target group deeming immunization among the top 5 as regards basic health issues increased by at least 20% compared to representatives of the same target group before EIW.

Three countries reported back, with an average of a 14% increase.

Indicator: Behaviour: The number of defined target groups indicating that they will ensure timely and appropriate vaccination increased by at least 20% compared to representatives of the same target group before EIW.

Five countries reported back, with an average of a 39% increase.



About European Immunization Week

WHY: Despite the fact that immunization is a basic right, it is not equally accessible throughout Europe. While major progress has been made in the fight against vaccine-preventable diseases, gaps in vaccination uptake rates show that immunization strengthening remains vital. Optimal protection requires uptake rates as high as 95%. However, annually an estimated 600 000 infants in the Region miss their routine vaccination, and children still die from diseases that could have been prevented with vaccines. Some of those not immunized belong to hard-to-reach groups that lack information about the importance and availability of vaccination. Others are not immunized as a result of anti-vaccination sentiment misinformation campaigns. European Immunization Week provides the momentum to counter these challenges.

WHAT: European Immunization Week assists Member States of the WHO European Region to fulfill their obligations of universal immunization. The main purpose of this inspiring initiative is to enable participating countries to focus on their national challenges and priorities regarding immunization and thus to increase the number of people that are immunized against vaccine-preventable diseases.

HOW: During the event, participating countries engage in a range of advocacy and targeted communication activities to promote the core message that the immunization of every child is vital to prevent disease and protect life. A special focus is placed on targeting vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups.

WHO: The annual initiative is led by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and implemented by Member States, which address their own specific immunization issues. Partner organizations contribute to action at both the regional and national levels.

Collaboration towards a future global immunization week: European Immunization Week overlaps with its sister initiative, The Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA), which is coordinated by the WHO/Pan American Health Organization. To unify EIW and VWA efforts, WHO/Europe and WHO/PAHO coordinate their regional activities where possible. For more information about VWA, please visit http://www.paho.org/english/ad/fch/im/VWA_home.htm.

For further information about European Immunization Week:

- Visit www.euro.who.int/eiw
- Sign up for the *EURO Immunization Monitor* at www.euro.who.int/vaccine (go to publications)
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