

Narrative Report: European Immunization Week

2010



**World Health
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR

Europe



European
Immunization
Week

Prevent Protect Immunize

Since European Immunization Week's beginnings in 2005 with only a handful of participating countries, the initiative has spread across the European Region. It has become an effective tool for sharing and reinforcing the central message: **Prevent. Protect. Immunize.**

An impressive 47 Member States joined the fifth European Immunization Week (EIW) from 24 April to 1 May 2010, the largest number of participating countries to date. The list of participants spanned the entire Region and reflected a widespread commitment to maintaining high immunization coverage.

The European Immunization Week (EIW) is a regional initiative, led and coordinated by the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) and implemented by the Member States of the European Region.

With an impending deadline for a goal set more than a decade earlier by the Member States of the Region – to eliminate measles and rubella by the end of 2010 – the fifth EIW focused on raising awareness about the elimination goal and what needed to happen on a country and regional level to achieve it. Momentum had stalled on this important goal in recent years, with vaccine coverage in some western European countries falling below the recommended 95% and leading to a resurgence of the disease. Although by the week of EIW it had become clear that not all countries would achieve the measles elimination goal in 2010, the initiative still provided a valuable opportunity to refocus on reaching it by 2015 – the new target date.

EIW 2010 by Numbers

- 47 participating Member States
- 8 first-time participants (Andorra, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway)
- 30+ real-time updates posted on EIW campaign site throughout the week
- Tens of thousands of vaccinations across the Region
- Thousands of participants attended workshops, trainings, conferences, symposia and round-table discussions
- Dozens of interviews with national media about the value and importance of immunization

EIW also took on an additional weight and importance in 2010 as Tajikistan reported an outbreak of polio just days before the initiative got underway. The outbreak presented a sobering reminder of why strengthening immunization must remain a priority in the Region.

Going virtual in 2010

After successfully using online technology to spread the EIW message in 2009, WHO/Europe sought to find new ways to expand EIW's online and virtual impact in 2010. The week of EIW 2010 opened with a virtual launch, hosted by WHO/Europe in conjunction with the World Bank and made possible by the Bank's Global Development Learning Network (GDLN). The EIW launch featured a video message from Director of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, Ms Zsuzsanna Jakab, and remarks from Dr Jose Martin-Moreno, Director, Programme Management. UNICEF Regional Director Steven Allen and Acting Director for ECDC Dr Karl Ekdhal joined the launch with statements of support.

Real-time updates on immunization activities

The virtual launch kicked off a full week of immunization activities that took place throughout the Region. The activities were varied and tailored to suit the needs of the countries. In order to collect and then share information about EIW activities in one central space, WHO/Europe debuted an EIW campaign site in 2010. This site allowed WHO/Europe to provide real-time updates about immunization activities occurring throughout the Region. It also gave EIW stakeholders the opportunity to contribute their own experiences, materials, and images, providing a simple way to share information. The campaign site helped create a sense of Region-wide momentum and action during EIW by aggregating information about independent country activities into one central space.

Visit the EIW campaign site at <http://eiw.euro.who.int>



EIW 2010 Highlights

Information and Awareness Activities

The week of EIW 2010 saw numerous information campaigns and events to boost awareness take place across the Region. A number of countries, such as first-time participants Finland, Iceland and Luxembourg, developed informational materials that were made available in health care centers and online. France's Ministry of Health created an excellent site devoted to "Semaine européenne de la vaccination" with an interactive map illustrating immunization events taking place in each region of the country.

Other participating countries used EIW to reach out to local and national media through press releases, press conferences and media workshops. Portugal engaged in a weeklong media campaign with health officials conducting interviews about immunization for national television and radio shows, as well as newspapers.

The week's activities also included a full schedule of well-attended lectures, meetings, roundtables and conferences, held in Ukraine, Poland, Italy, Azerbaijan, Belgium and Hungary, among other countries. In Bulgaria, a roundtable in the National Assembly brought together ministers, representatives from national associations of health professionals, NGOs and members of the media to discuss multi-sectoral approaches to strengthening routine immunization and next steps toward modernizing the national immunization calendar.

Several countries also held trainings and workshops for health care workers, parents and students about vaccination, and schoolchildren in Turkmenistan learned about vaccines through art activities.

Immunization Outreach

Immunization outreach was a focus of EIW 2010, including:

- rubella vaccinations for more than 100,000 in Kazakhstan;
- mobile immunization teams visiting Roma populations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- more than 1,200 children registered for immunization in Albania, resulting in nearly 300 vaccinations in one month;
- 2,000 MMR immunizations in Malta;
- a vaccination campaign for children ages 0-6 in Azerbaijan, which administered more than 25,000 vaccines; and
- 820 polio vaccinations in Uzbekistan.

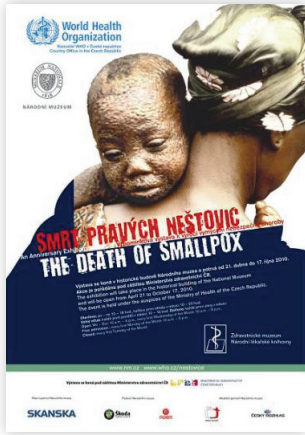
▲ EIW takes flight in Copenhagen

WHO/Europe partnered with the Danish Board of Health during EIW 2010 to bring the message of EIW to travelers in the Copenhagen airport. A display in the main terminal alerted travelers to EIW, while WHO/Europe staff and interns handed out informational brochures and answered questions about immunization. WHO/Europe Regional Director Zsuzsanna Jakab was able to stop by the display on her way to a meeting in Malta, just one of hundreds of travelers who benefited from the EIW display throughout the week. WHO/Europe's activity at the Copenhagen airport was intended to be a pilot, and hopefully similar activities will be rolled out in other airports around the Region in coming years.



▲ Pairing innovation and immunization

As an innovative way to educate about immunization, the Ministry of Health of The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia held a musical event for children during EIW 2010. This event paired folk songs with immunization awareness and gave children a unique opportunity to learn about the importance of vaccination. The event was followed by a week of field immunizations for Roma children and rural populations, in conjunction with visits from high-ranking health officials. These activities resulted in more than 9,500 total immunizations, and vaccinations for nearly 1,000 Roma children.



▲ **Commemorating smallpox eradication in the Czech Republic**
 An exhibit on “The Death of Smallpox” opened during EIW 2010 at the National Museum in the Czech Republic. This exhibit commemorated the eradication of that disease, and its opening was accompanied by a press conference, technical conference and the publishing of a companion book. In recognition of EIW 2010, these events brought together immunization experts and those that played a central role in eliminating smallpox. These events provided an important reminder of the successes that can accompany strong immunization efforts.



Sharing experiences virtually

Following the virtual launch of EIW 2010, participants from several countries linked into a video-conference, which was made available via webcast, entitled “Key challenges in reaching non-immunized and partially immunized populations in the European Region – Best practices and lessons learned”. The interactive conference allowed participants to hear from Dr Nedret Emiroglu and Dr Rebecca Martin of WHO/Europe, Professor David Salisbury, Director of Immunisation for the United Kingdom’s Department of Health, and Dr Svetlana Zmitrovich, EPI manager for Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Health. These presentations then led to a focused discussion about immunization and the goal to eliminate measles, during which the countries participating via video conference link (including Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey and the United Kingdom) were able to share their experiences and address common challenges. According to participants, the videoconference provided a welcome opportunity to interact with WHO and its partners, as well as neighbouring countries.

Moving forward

In 2010, EIW was held simultaneously with Vaccination Week in the Americas (PAHO) and the first ever Vaccination Week in the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO), bringing WHO closer to realizing the goal of an annual global immunization initiative. In the coming years, WHO/Europe hopes to coordinate even more closely with other WHO Regional Offices in order to give immunization weeks a unified and global character. WHO/Europe also plans to continue using the campaign site (<http://eiw.euro.who.int>) to encourage and facilitate communication and interaction among EIW stakeholders throughout the year and to share interesting and important immunization news with site members.