

The elements of a strong immunization programme – and why we need to invest in them

This document is intended to support immunization programme managers and staff in their efforts to secure sustainable funding for immunization.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

Some stakeholders may believe that a strong immunization programme is just about procuring high-quality vaccines. They may not understand why it is so crucial to invest in the immunization programme as a whole – and why all elements of the immunization programme need to be strong and well functioning.

This document presents the good reasons why.

You can use these messages when preparing for a meeting with stakeholders or when submitting your budget requests.

Define your funding gap and the expected output of investments in concrete terms. Adjust the text and use it so that it fits your funding needs.



The elements of a strong immunization programme – and why we need to invest in them

Ensuring population immunity against vaccine-preventable diseases is a complex and challenging process that requires continued investment. **Any weak link can jeopardize the success of the immunization programme.**

Reaching every person



Key messages

- Individuals must receive information about the risks of vaccine-preventable diseases and the benefits and risks of vaccination to enhance trust in vaccines, immunization services and health authorities.
- Tailored strategies based on reliable research and evidence are crucial to stimulate demand for vaccines.
- Research and improved immunization data to monitor perceptions, knowledge and attitudes are crucial to ensure equitable extension of services.

Every individual has the right to be fully protected against vaccine-preventable diseases. To ensure high vaccination coverage in all population groups, immunization programmes need to make sure that individuals understand the value of immunization and demand vaccination as their right and their responsibility.

The barriers to vaccine demand are complex and context specific and include social, cultural and other behavioural determinants. Immunization programmes need to invest in research and improved immunization data to monitor perceptions, knowledge and attitudes towards immunization in all population groups. Based on this information, they must develop tailored and innovative strategies to ensure equitable extension of services. This includes advocacy and communication to susceptible populations, including vaccine-hesitant population groups as well as mobile, marginalized and migrant populations.

Successfully countering anti-vaccination sentiment and safety concerns will depend on this in particular. Thus, failure to invest in tailored strategies to reach and communicate with all population groups may not only lead to outbreaks, but also to widespread distrust in vaccines and the immunization system.



Staff training and capacity building

Key messages

- Staff training is crucial to the success of the immunization programme.
- Vaccinators need the skills to handle and administer vaccines correctly.
- Vaccinators need the skills to communicate with and reassure parents and vaccinees.
- Failure to administer the vaccine and communicate properly may jeopardize public trust in vaccines and health authorities.

Systems are never stronger than the people who are delivering their services. Health care workers are the faces of the immunization system. Their skills and capacities are crucial to the success of the immunization programme.

Among other skills, health care workers must be able to ensure correct storage of the vaccine, administer the correct dose and possible diluent, select the correct needle size and the appropriate route for the vaccine, maintain aseptic techniques and properly dispose of the needle, syringe and live vaccine vial.

Mistakes can cause serious adverse events and suffering for the child, and may also lead to widespread distrust in the immunization system and fear of vaccination.

Interpersonal communication skills are equally important. Health care workers must take people's concerns seriously and be able to respond to questions concerning vaccines – using words that reassure and are easily understood by laymen.

Failure to communicate properly with parents about vaccines may jeopardize trust in vaccines and health authorities in general.



Organization, planning and supervision

Key messages

- The immunization programme organizes a complex system engaging thousands of persons, institutions and facilities.
- Immunization can only be successful if the process is well coordinated and properly supervised.
- Extraordinary immunization activities, such as supplementary activities or new vaccine introductions, need careful planning and involvement of stakeholders at all levels.

Numerous people, institutions and facilities are engaged in the immunization programme. All of them contribute to making immunization a success; however, they can only do so if the process is carefully planned and continuously supervised. This is necessary to ensure that the right and properly stored vaccines are administered correctly by skilled vaccinators under the best-possible circumstances. Regular supportive supervision is also necessary to ensure capacity building among staff.

Immunization activities must be carefully planned and prepared to ensure their success. Introduction of a new vaccine, for example, is a complex process in which national and local staff work closely together with public and private sector stakeholders to assess and overcome challenges and ensure proper distribution and administration of the vaccine. Supplementary immunization activities entail equally complicated planning processes.



Monitoring, surveillance and response systems

Key messages

- Efficient surveillance and response systems can prevent small outbreaks from developing into uncontrollable, larger outbreaks.
- Surveillance and monitoring can also help avoid or mitigate the negative implications of real or perceived side effects of vaccination.
- New information technologies can ensure that valid and accurate data is collected, so that under- and unvaccinated groups are detected and reached, avoiding outbreaks in specific locations or population groups.

Adverse events can have devastating implications for public trust in vaccines and the health system. Small outbreaks can develop into larger outbreaks that are not easily controlled. In any such event, proper surveillance, risk mitigation and an effective response can prevent or limit the negative consequences – saving vast amounts of money and resources that would have been spent on handling the crisis at a later stage. Effective response systems entail that the country is able to immediately investigate any real or perceived adverse event and act accordingly.

Surveillance systems must also be detailed enough for countries to be able to identify and reach unvaccinated populations. With the use of new information technologies, valid and accurate data can be collected, transmitted and analysed.

Even with high levels of national routine immunization coverage, every country has populations that are not immunized or underimmunized. These groups are not fully protected from diseases, and many countries with high national coverage have experienced large outbreaks in such groups in recent years.



Supply chain systems

Key messages

- Ensuring safe and timely distribution of vaccines is associated with great challenges that risk negatively affect the quality of the vaccine.
- High-quality supply chain systems are complex and require continued investment.
- Multiple products, entities and responsibilities in both the public and private sectors are involved.

Sufficient immunization supplies must be available at the right time and place, including vaccines, injection devices and equipment for safe waste disposal. Ensuring a high-quality supply chain system has become more complex in recent years and requires continued investment. The system involves multiple products, entities and responsibilities in both the public and private sectors. This complexity is compounded by new risks and challenges, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, in ensuring safe and timely distribution of vaccines to their final point of use.

Cold chain, storage and handling systems



Key messages

- Improper transportation, storage or handling of vaccines may jeopardize their quality, safety and efficiency.
- High-quality equipment is necessary.
- Strategies and procedures for routine as well as emergency situations must be in place.

Proper vaccine storage and handling play a critical role. The quality and efficiency of the vaccine must be maintained throughout the process from the manufacturer to the vaccinee. Each vaccine needs to be stored at the right temperature and together with the right diluent. High-quality equipment and procedures are necessary to reach this end, including storage and transport facilities, strategies for cold chain, storage and handling practices as well as inventory management, contingency planning and emergency procedures.

