

# PAHO



Pan American  
Health  
Organization



World Health  
Organization  
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE  
Americas



## News release

## 20th Vaccination Week of the Americas aims to vaccinate nearly 140 million people

*PAHO initiative is an opportunity to accelerate vaccination against COVID-19 and improve coverage rates for other vaccines that have declined over the past decade*

Are you fully  
vaccinated?



Vaccines help  
**PROTECT**  
you and you baby against  
serious diseases.



**Washington, DC, April 22, 2022 (PAHO/WHO)**- With the goal of accelerating vaccination against COVID-19 and closing coverage gaps against other vaccine-preventable diseases, countries and territories in the Americas plan to immunize some 140 million people as part of [Vaccination Week in the Americas](#), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) initiative that celebrates its 20th anniversary this year.

The theme of the Week, which runs from April 23-30, is "Are you protected? Get all your vaccines," and calls on the entire population to review their vaccination schedules and get vaccinated to be fully protected.

"This Vaccination Week is an opportunity to improve vaccination rates against polio, measles, rubella, diphtheria and other preventable diseases that have fallen in the last ten years," said PAHO Director Carissa F. Etienne. "Vaccines work and in the last 20 years have prevented millions from getting sick, hospitalized and even dying. This is why it is vital that everyone has access," she said.

In two years of the pandemic, the focus on controlling COVID-19 has left health systems and health care professionals overwhelmed and has set back almost three decades of progress in the fight against polio and measles in the region. In 2020, more than 2.7 million children in the Americas were unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated, making them susceptible to diseases such as measles, polio and diphtheria, the first two of which were eliminated from the region.

While the coverage rate with the three doses of polio vaccine stood at 82% in 2020 - the lowest since 1994 - the regional coverage rate against measles, mumps and rubella (with MMR1 MMR vaccine) was 87%, six percentage points lower than the 93% recorded in 2016.

Meanwhile, regional coverage for diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (with DTP3 vaccine) also fell from 91% in 2016 to 85% in 2020. All of these rates fell below the 95% recommended by PAHO to prevent outbreaks.

"Vaccines remain our best protection. We cannot let our guard down," Etienne stressed. "We must intensify efforts to reverse this situation, and we know how to do it, our history of eliminating vaccine-preventable diseases proves it."

With nearly 1.8 billion doses administered in the region in just 16 months, vaccination against COVID-19 is the largest immunization program in history. Fourteen countries have already reached the WHO goal of vaccinating 70% of their populations ahead of June 30th, 2022, 26 have achieved coverage between 40% and 69%, and 11 remain below 40%. "Success is possible when we work together to embrace vaccination," said the PAHO

Director, urging countries to "take advantage of Vaccination Week to reach the most vulnerable."

The [launch](#) of Vaccination Week in the Americas will be marked with an event on April 25 in Dominica, which will be attended by the PAHO Director and the highest authorities of the Caribbean country. Video messages are also expected from the presidents of Chile, Ecuador and Honduras, as well as from the Secretary General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

The Americas region is a global benchmark in immunizations. In 1971, it became the first region in the world to eliminate smallpox. In 1994, it managed to certify the elimination of polio, in 2015, it put an end to rubella and congenital rubella syndrome, in 2016, it eliminated measles, and in 2017, neonatal tetanus.

Vaccination Week in the Americas began in 2003 as an effort by countries in the region to tackle a measles outbreak in Colombia and Venezuela. Over the past 19 years, more than one billion people of all ages have been vaccinated against some 20 diseases under the initiative. In 2012 it became a global movement when the World Health Assembly established [World Immunization Week](#).

## Links

Vaccination Week in the Americas

<https://www.paho.org/en/campaigns/vaccination-week-americas-2022>

PAHO Director's message for Vaccination Week

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poo-EsdBEyo>

## MEDIA CONTACTS

Luciana Viegas: + 1 202 981-8455

Ashley Baldwin: + 1 202 340-4025

Sebastian Oliel: +1 202 316-5679

[mediateam@paho.org](mailto:mediateam@paho.org)

[www.paho.org](http://www.paho.org)

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of its population. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system.