

PAHO



Pan American
Health
Organization



World Health
Organization
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
AMERICAS

News release

Countries of the Caribbean agree to strengthen national immunization programs through Declaration of Nassau

Over 11,000 children under the age of one continue to miss out on routine vaccination doses in the Caribbean. Urgent action must be taken to prevent an impending crisis.



Nassau, Bahamas, 27 April 2023 (PAHO) – Ministers of Health of the Caribbean met in Nassau, Bahamas, yesterday and agreed to the Declaration of Nassau, which commits governments to take evidence-informed measures to strengthen national immunization programs in the Caribbean.

Almost one in ten children under the age of one-year (over 11,000) in the Caribbean do not receive all of their routine vaccination doses, leaving them

susceptible to diseases such as polio, tetanus, measles and diphtheria. The Declaration, which was signed during the 29th Special Meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) on the occasion of the 21st Vaccination Week in the Americas, commits governments to ensuring that immunization returns to the forefront of countries' health policy agendas through political visibility and sustainable financing.

"Over the decades, PAHO has worked hand-in-hand with Caribbean Member States to eradicate smallpox and polio, and to end endemic transmission of measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome and other preventable diseases," Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director, Dr. Jarbas Barbosa said in an address to the meeting.

The Director highlighted the importance of maintaining these gains given the "great risk of the reemergence of diseases which had already been eliminated from our Region."

"Historically, immunization coverage in the Caribbean has been high, but this has been declining in recent years," added Dr. Karen Broome, Immunization Advisor for the Caribbean Sub region at PAHO.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened an already concerning situation, leaving gaps in human, financial and material resources within countries' immunization programs."

In response to this, the Declaration of Nassau proposes to strengthen national immunization programs using evidence-informed interventions, including through prioritizing immunity gaps among children, older persons, pregnant women, persons with pre-existing conditions, health workers and those living in situations of vulnerability.

It also calls on countries to maintain the regional targets for the control and elimination of polio, measles, rubella, tetanus, Hepatitis B, bacterial meningitis and cervical cancer, and proposes the development of policies and strategies to address vaccine hesitancy and infodemics.

Reiterating PAHO's commitment to increasing immunization coverage, Dr. Barbosa highlighted a joint initiative between PAHO and the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) to utilize refunds from COVAX to help support

routine vaccination for Member States. This will provide key support for the implementation of initiatives outlined in the Declaration.

"The Caribbean has long been a leader in public health in several key areas," said the PAHO Director. "I look forward to strengthening our work with you in the coming years as we address the major public health challenges."

DECLARATION OF NASSAU: REINVIGORATING THE NATIONAL IMMUNIZATION PROGRAMS OF THE CARIBBEAN

We, the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) – Health at the 29th Special Meeting in Nassau, Bahamas on 26 April 2023, on the occasion the 21st Annual Vaccination Week in the Americas 2023;

Aware that, in 2021, more than 11,000 children younger than 1 year in the Caribbean (almost one in ten) did not receive all their vaccine doses, leaving them susceptible to diseases such as polio, tetanus, measles and diphtheria."

Conscious of the impending crisis generated by these historically low vaccination coverage rates reported over the last 10 years;

Impelled by the risk of vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks in the Region of the Americas, which now stands is at its highest point in the last 30 years;

Fully convinced that Governments must return their immunization programs to the top of the political agenda to better tackle the challenges the pandemic has brought forth;

Declare –

1. Our unequivocal commitment to strengthen the national immunization programs of the Caribbean through political visibility and sustainable financing.
2. Our promise to maintain the regional targets for the control or elimination of polio, measles, rubella, tetanus, Hepatitis B, bacterial meningitis and cervical cancer.
3. Our commitment to close the most urgent immunity gaps, especially among the elderly, pregnant women, persons with comorbidities, health workers and persons living in situation of vulnerability.

4. Our intent to develop policies and identify strategies to address vaccine hesitancy and infodemics for the population at large, using an evidence-based approach.
5. That we will work with professional health associations and academia to provide periodic training to all categories of health workers on the essential elements of the vaccination program, so they can promote vaccines to their patients in all confidence.

Links

[PAHO - Immunization](#)

[Vaccination Week in the Americas 2023](#)

MEDIA CONTACTS

Luciana Viegas: + 1 202 981-8455

Ashley Baldwin: + 1 202 340-4025

Sebastian Oliel: +1 202 316-5679

mediateam@paho.org

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.