

# PAHO



Pan American  
Health  
Organization



World Health  
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Americas Region

## News Release

### Recent outbreaks in the Americas underscore need to urgently address immunization gaps, PAHO Director says

*Over 66 million vaccine doses to be administered during Vaccination Week in the Americas, including 2.7 million doses of measles-containing vaccine*



**Washington, DC, 24 April 2025 (PAHO)** – As countries in the Americas confront outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles and yellow fever, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director, Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, called for urgent action to address gaps in immunization coverage.

“Over the past five decades, vaccines have saved 154 million lives worldwide, reducing child mortality by 41% in the Americas alone”, the PAHO Director said during a press briefing held today ahead of Vaccination Week in the Americas— a flagship initiative led by PAHO, taking place from April 26 to May 3. However, “our progress against vaccine-preventable diseases needs a strong and lasting commitment to implement the appropriate public health measures.”

Worldwide, confirmed measles cases exceeded 359,000 in 2024. This, combined with gaps in vaccination coverage, have led to localized outbreaks across six countries in the Americas, with 2,313 reported cases so far this year —up from just 215 during the same period in 2024. Three deaths have been confirmed, and another is under investigation.

“Measles is one of the most contagious diseases in the world,” Dr. Barbosa said. “Yet countries have struggled to sustain the recommended 95% coverage of MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine, which leaves us susceptible to imported cases.”

Progress has been made in recent years. For the first time since 2019, MMR1 coverage increased in 2023, reaching 87% across the Americas. Despite this improvement, there remains a significant gap: 1.4 million children in the Region did not receive any dose of the MMR vaccine that year. Outbreaks have been observed in communities where just 3% to 7% of individuals were susceptible, highlighting the risk posed by even small pockets of low coverage.

During this year’s Vaccination Week in the Americas countries across the Region plan to administer an estimated 66.5 million doses of vaccines, including 2.7 million targeting measles. Now in its 23rd year, the initiative has so far enabled over 1.2 billion people to be vaccinated since its launch in 2003. Under the slogan “Your decision makes the difference. Immunization for all,” countries are mobilizing to reach those at highest risk of missing vaccines, especially children.

In 2025, the Region has also seen an uptick in yellow fever, with four countries reporting 189 cases so far, including 74 deaths, compared to 61 cases and 30 deaths reported during 2024.

To address these outbreaks, PAHO is working with countries to tackle vaccine hesitancy, strengthen routine immunization programs, and expand access to vaccination using microplanning and digital tools such as electronic immunization registries and geographic information systems. These tools help monitor coverage, identify gaps, and “stop the virus in its tracks,” Dr. Barbosa said.

Dr. Barbosa also highlighted the importance of the PAHO Revolving Fund, a pooled procurement mechanism that allows countries in the Americas to access high-quality vaccines at affordable prices. “Without the Fund, countries would pay at least 75% more for the Region’s 13 most common vaccines,” he said.

While Vaccination Week in the Americas “remains a cornerstone of public health in the Region,” Dr. Barbosa emphasized that “immunization does not end with Vaccination Week.”

The Americas has a legacy of leadership in vaccination and disease elimination. The Region was the first to eliminate smallpox in 1974 and polio in 1994, and has also eliminated measles, rubella, congenital rubella syndrome, maternal and neonatal tetanus, and outbreaks of urban yellow fever.

Now, PAHO is supporting countries through its [Disease Elimination Initiative](#), a bold effort to eliminate more than 30 diseases and related conditions by 2030, 11 of which are vaccine preventable.

In 2024, the Region successfully regained its status as free of endemic measles. While this status remains intact, recent outbreaks serve as a reminder of the ongoing risk and the importance of maintaining high vaccination coverage to prevent the reestablishment of endemic transmission.

“The Region of the Americas is ours to protect,” Dr. Barbosa said. “By working together, throughout vaccination week and beyond, we can build a stronger, safer, and healthier Americas,” the PAHO Director concluded.

## **Vaccination Week in the Americas**

Vaccination Week in the Americas is a regional initiative that aims to promote equity and access to vaccination in all countries of the Region of the Americas. The theme this year, “Your decision makes a difference. Immunization for all,” highlights the urgent need to prevent the spread of life-threatening diseases and keep each one of us, our families, and our communities, safe.

The Regional launch of the week will take place on Monday, 28 April, in Panama. National launches and initiatives will also be held throughout the Region.

## **Links**

[Video recording - Press conference \(In English\)](#)

[PAHO Director's remarks](#)

[Vaccination Week in the Americas 2025](#)

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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 (OAS).