

# PAHO



Pan American  
Health  
Organization



World Health  
Organization  
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE  
Americas

## News release

### **Risk of vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks at 30-year high, PAHO Director says**

*In 2021, one in five children under the age of one year did not receive all vaccine doses. With Vaccination Week in the Americas 2023 starting next week, countries must accelerate efforts to improve routine vaccination coverage.*



**Washington, DC, 20 April, 2023 (PAHO)** – The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director, Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, calls on countries to urgently step-up routine vaccination programs as the risk of disease outbreaks in the Americas reaches a 30-year high due to a decline in vaccination coverage.

While the Americas was the first region in the world to eliminate polio in 1994 and has historically been a world leader in disease control and elimination, “national immunization programs have suffered numerous setbacks over the last decade,” Dr. Barbosa said during a media briefing today.

Inadequate sustainable financing for immunization and an increase in vaccine hesitancy due to misinformation have been among the primary drivers of the drop in coverage, he added, factors further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, the Region of the Americas is the second in the world with the worst vaccine coverage. Around 2.7 million children did not receive all their vaccine doses in 2021, leaving them without full protection against diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough. Two countries – Brazil and Mexico – account for more than 50% of children that have never received a vaccine in the region.

Failure to effectively implement and maintain routine vaccination coverage leaves children “susceptible to diseases such as polio, tetanus, measles and diphtheria,” Dr. Barbosa said.

In the run up to Vaccination Week in the Americas, starting next week from 22 to 29 April, the PAHO Director urged countries to step up efforts to “recover the vaccination coverage rates that protected us in the past.”

Vaccination Week in the Americas is “an extraordinary strategy to complement the efforts of national immunization programs,” Dr. Barbosa said, supporting efforts to protect more than 1 billion people of all ages since its inception 20 years ago.

This year, the theme of the week is *Get up to date #EachVaccineCounts* and the aim is to reach more than 92 million people across the Region with life-saving vaccines.

PAHO’s commitment to strengthening national immunization programs does not stop at these events, the Director added.

The Organization continues to work with countries of the region, technical partners, and donors to strengthen and modernize national immunization programs, improve and reinforce cold chain operations and implement innovative approaches to better tackle the challenges the pandemic has brought forth.

PAHO is also supporting vaccine production through its Regional Platform to

Advance the Manufacturing of COVID-19 Vaccines and other Health Technologies in the Americas, and is already working with Sinergium Biotech in Argentina and the Bio-Manguinhos Institute (FIOCRUZ) in Brazil, on the regional development and production of mRNA-based vaccines.

“National immunization programs are our first line of defense against outbreaks,” Dr. Barbosa said. “But each one of us can do our part to protect ourselves and our loved ones. And we can start by getting all our shots during Vaccination Week in the Americas.”

### **Vaccination in the Americas in numbers**

- In 2021, more than 2.7 million children under 1 year did not receive all their vaccine doses against diphtheria, tetanus, and whooping cough.
- In 2010, the Americas was the second region with the highest reported vaccination coverage. Today, it is second in the world with the worst coverage.
- The risk of outbreaks due to vaccine-preventable diseases is currently at its highest point in the last 30 years.
- National immunization programs in Latin America and the Caribbean prevent around 174,000 deaths in children under five each year.
- Since 2003, Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA) has helped countries reach nearly 1.1 billion people with life-saving vaccines in more than 40 countries and territories.
- VWA has supported the elimination of six vaccine-preventable diseases: polio, measles, congenital rubella syndrome, neonatal tetanus, hepatitis B and smallpox.

This year, VWA aims to support 45 countries and territories to reach more than 92 million people with over 144 million doses of different vaccines.

### **Links**

[Vaccination in the Americas - Factsheet](#)

[Vaccination week in the Americas](#)

[PAHO Director's remarks](#)

[Video \(press briefing\) - English](#)

**VWA 2023**  
VACCINATION WEEK IN THE AMERICAS

# VACCINATION WEEK IN THE AMERICAS

**GET UP-TO-DATE.**



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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.