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#VaccinesWork

VACCINATION WEEK IN THE AMERICAS 2021



**PAHO**



Pan American  
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Organization



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REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE  
Americas

VACCINATION WEEK IN THE AMERICAS 2021  
**FINAL REPORT**

Vaccination Week in the Americas 2021. Final Report

PAHO/FPL/IM/COVID-19/22-0008

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## Director's message: Dr. Carissa F. Etienne

In her address at the opening of the 19th annual Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA), Dr. Carissa F. Etienne, the Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), gave an impassioned plea to the global community to get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it was available and reminded the world of the importance of maintaining routine immunization services for vaccine-preventable diseases.

Dr. Etienne urged countries to “close the immunization gap that resulted in hundreds of thousands of children missing vaccinations last year” (1). Major interruptions in the global supply chain and the redirection of health care resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic have caused a serious decline in routine immunizations for children and vulnerable populations.



“I implore you to please get vaccinated when it is your turn to do so. Vaccines are a critical tool for protecting us from COVID-19. We are already seeing that fewer people are falling ill, being hospitalized, and dying from COVID-19 in places where vaccination coverage is more advanced.” – Dr. Carissa F. Etienne, Director, PAHO

The Americas was the first region in the world to eradicate smallpox and eliminate polio, measles, and rubella due to countries' robust public health efforts to vaccinate their populations, reminded Dr. Etienne. She maintained that this successful strategy must also be applied to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and reversing the progress lost due to lockdowns and restricted movement. Dr. Etienne also called

for government policies to strengthen public confidence in vaccination. She urged promotion of immunization during the COVID-19 pandemic and support for introduction of COVID-19 vaccines. She also called for maintaining public health measures – physical distancing, mask wearing, and proper hand hygiene – throughout the COVID-19 vaccination process and until the end of the pandemic.



# Summary



From **April 24-30, 2021**, the Region of the Americas celebrated its 19th Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA) campaign and its 10th World Immunization Week.



The 2021 regional slogan was **"Vaccines Bring Us Closer. #GetVax."**



In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, PAHO emphasized that **VWA is a flexible platform** and that the activities developed under its framework can be adapted to different local, national, regional, and global contexts.



**12 countries and territories of the Americas** participated in VWA 2021. However, some countries postponed their activities or did not participate at all due to the global epidemiological situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.



**7 countries** used VWA as a platform to **vaccinate their population against influenza**, prioritizing health care workers, older adults, and people with chronic illnesses. They reached **more than 65 million people of all ages**.



**12 countries** vaccinated more than **2.7 million** children and adults against measles to help support the goal of elimination.



**11 countries** carried out activities to protect the **polio eradication achievement** as part of VWA 2021, and **9 countries** used VWA as a platform to vaccinate teenagers against the **human papillomavirus (HPV)**.



**At least 12 countries** used **social media** (e.g., Twitter and Facebook) as an alternative solution to mass in-person events to promote the importance of vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic and to encourage people to continue getting vaccinated.



Since 2003, **more than 1 billion people** of all ages have been vaccinated under the VWA umbrella.



**More than 200,000 vaccine doses** were administered during VWA 2021.



Measles Outbreak between Colombia and Venezuela

2002

2003



1st European Immunization Week

2005

2004

2006

2007

2008

H1N1 Pandemic

2009



1st African Immunization Week

2010

2011

1st Vaccination Week in Western Pacific

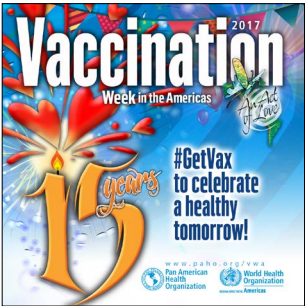
2012

2013

2014

2015

2016



15 years of VWA

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021



1st Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA)

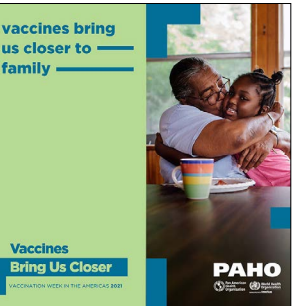
1st Vaccination Week in the Eastern Mediterranean



10 years of VWA



1st Immunization Week in South-East Asia



19th VWA

# Background

## WHAT IS VACCINATION WEEK IN THE AMERICAS?

Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA) is a regional initiative that aims to promote equity and access to vaccination in all countries in the Region of the Americas.

The participation of the countries of the Americas in VWA is flexible. The VWA platform can be adapted to national, regional, and global contexts to select activities that best meet local public health priorities. At the heart of this initiative are countries' relentless efforts to reach vulnerable population groups with little or no access to regular health services, such as those living in urban peripheries, rural or border areas, and indigenous communities, with vaccination.

With these efforts, VWA has contributed to strengthening national immunization programs in the countries of the

Region. The initiative has also provided a substantial platform for promoting the importance of vaccination, keeping the issue at the top of the political agenda, and continuing to attract media attention. VWA has become a shining example of what can happen when countries come together, across borders, cultures, and languages, with the goal of improving the health of their populations.

The overarching objectives of Vaccination Week are:

- Promote equity and access to immunization
- Promote the transition from child to family immunization
- Maintain immunization on the political agenda
- Increase vaccination coverage of all antigens
- Serve as a platform for integrated activities

## VACCINATION WEEK IN THE AMERICAS' ORIGINS

In response to the 2002 measles outbreak along the Venezuelan-Colombian border, Andean health ministers proposed the idea of a coordinated international vaccination campaign to prevent further spread of the disease. With support from PAHO, this proposal evolved over the succeeding months into the effort now known as Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA).

VWA was first celebrated in April 2002 with 19 countries and territories participating. Later that year, the initiative was endorsed through a resolution during PAHO's 44th Directing Council (2). Today, the initiative has matured into a hemispheric celebration of the power of vaccination and serves as a key annual opportunity for all countries of the Americas to highlight the essential work of their national immunization programs.



COVID-19 vaccination center, Argentina  
© Ministerio De Salud Argentina

# VWA 2021: Pandemic adaptations and COVID-19 vaccine rollout

The COVID-19 pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020; it was the first non-influenza pandemic affecting more than 200 countries, with more than 300 million cases and 5.5 million deaths globally at the end of 2021. Approximately half of the cases have been reported in the Region of the Americas. In many countries in the Region, the declaration of the pandemic, as well as the physical containment and distancing measures that were imposed, coincided with the celebration of VWA. As such, the overall participation in the event remained at an all-time low for the second year in a row. Most health care resources and manpower in member states usually reserved for VWA have been redirected to fight this deadly pandemic.

Consequently, this international epidemiological situation affected the development of VWA and forced countries to think of different strategies to be able to carry out their activities and adjust them to their national and local contexts (3). Thus, in addition to adhering to the general objectives of VWA, the importance of using this platform to integrate educational activities such as handwashing and physical distancing (measures in response to the pandemic) was promoted directly with countries and in the media. In addition, it was recommended that vaccination services not be disrupted to prevent outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases.

Following many of the same strategies from last year, VWA 2021 utilized available resources to reach populations safely with COVID-19 and routine immunizations. Outdoor venues and drive-through or walk-up vaccination centers were used by various countries to help maintain social distancing measures while providing access to necessary immunization services. Other countries utilized community health care workers and pop-up sites specifically to address the massive need for access to COVID-19 vaccines for everyone (4).

International partners such as COVAX supplied several countries in the Region of the Americas with much-needed doses of COVID-19 vaccines during the VWA program. Argentina received a large shipment of nearly 1 million COVID-19 vaccine doses at the start of VWA to kickstart its national campaign (5). Bolivia received a shipment of approximately 90,000 doses during VWA as well from the COVAX mechanism (6). The COVID-19 vaccine rollout has been particularly challenging in low-resource settings due to the low temperature storage requirements of the COVID-19 vaccine doses. Remote and rural communities with limited infrastructure have been further disadvantaged by this new challenge. As such, PAHO encouraged members to create targeted vaccination campaigns for people living in border regions and for people of indigenous or afro-descendants.

To achieve this task, PAHO considered it necessary to communicate to its countries specific recommendations to adapt the planning and implementation of their campaigns.

These recommendations included the following:

- Ensure that planned activities for the 2021 VWA followed the recommendations of the national COVID-19 response plan (e.g., implementation of physical distancing measures).
- Cancel mass events, parades, fairs, and so forth and spread messages about the importance of vaccination throughout the week through virtual media such as social media, television, and radio.
- Emphasize the strengthening of institutional vaccination, adapting logistical and operational aspects to avoid crowds in hospitals and health centers.
- Consider and adapt measures for the protection of health personnel and for the vaccination of people in their communities, in hospitals, and in health centers, accordingly.



Health officials in Ecuador receive a COVAX shipment of COVID-19 vaccines during VWA 2021

© UNICEF



Faced with this global situation, several countries in the Region decided to postpone VWA activities in 2020 to allocate all their resources to the COVID-19 response. In 2021, most countries in the Americas region did not participate in VWA activities for the second consecutive year for these same reasons, and only 12 countries sent in cumulative reports detailing their scaled-back activities.

However, the final reports sent back to PAHO highlighted the need for additional support and donations of COVID-19 vaccines to support those members without access to the vaccine. Of the 12 countries that reported their VWA activities,

only nine reported that they had COVID-19 vaccines, and these countries distributed just over 137 million doses. For perspective, there are approximately 1.3 billion people living within the PAHO region, and many of the COVID-19 vaccines require more than one dose to be fully effective.

In April of 2021, COVID-19 vaccines were in the early stages of distribution and there were no major manufacturing centers for COVID-19 vaccines in South America. Delays in the global supply chain, vaccine hoarding by major world powers, and the cold-chain storage requirements of COVID-19 vaccines also contributed to the lack of supply in the PAHO region (7, 8).

RENEWED EMPHASIS ON VULNERABLE POPULATIONS AND FRONTLINE WORKERS

During the 2020 VWA campaign, PAHO put a particular emphasis on maintaining immunization services for health care workers and expanded upon this mandate for VWA 2021. The 2021 campaign asked countries to ensure that community members most vulnerable to coronavirus disease were included in their national VWA campaign plans. This included at-risk groups such as older adults, those in high-risk occupations, health care workers, persons of African or indigenous descent, and people living in border areas.



© UNICEF



Outdoor vaccination in Amapá (Brazil)  
© PAHO/WHO

As part of the global pandemic response, PAHO has been a key factor in helping to provide organizational support and health care resource delivery for countries in the Americas region. As a collaborator with COVAX, PAHO has helped to procure personal protective equipment such as masks, gowns, and gloves; more than 20 million vaccine doses; and more than 25 million COVID-19 tests including both polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and rapid antigen tests. Additionally, PAHO has provided technical training exercises to help support testing, epidemiological tracing, and clinical care for health care systems in the Region (9).

Similarly, PAHO presented recommendations so that countries could adopt concrete measures to ensure continuity of vaccination services and protection of health personnel. The measures aimed at services focused on the following aspects:

- Reorganize vaccination services to be administered outdoors or in well-ventilated spaces.
- Keep vaccination services separate from other services in order to keep sick people away from people without symptoms.



Vaccination of indigenous populations in Nariño (Colombia)  
© PAHO/WHO

- Frequently disinfect the spaces dedicated to administering vaccinations.
- Arrange for units with hand disinfectant or hand washing stations with chlorinated water at the entrance.
- Establish exclusive vaccination sessions or schedules for vulnerable groups (older adults, pregnant people, and people with preexisting conditions).

PAHO also recommended that vaccinators take some measures to protect themselves and their patients during vaccination:

- Practice correct and frequent hand hygiene.
- Comply with approved standards (wear uniforms only in the workplace, do not wear accessories such as earrings or watches, and always wear closed shoes).
- Clean your cellphone properly and do not use it during contact with patients.
- Don't touch nose, eyes, or mouth.
- Isolate yourself and contact a doctor if you have symptoms of COVID-19.





Regional launching event of Vaccination Week in the Americas 2021  
© PAHO/WHO

REGIONAL LAUNCH: VIRTUAL ADAPTATIONS

To celebrate the launch of VWA 2021 and its 19 years, PAHO organized a regional virtual launch event with participation from the Organization’s executive management and the presidents of Colombia and Costa Rica. In a special moment during the launch, football player Pelé sent a special VWA greeting and spoke of the importance of vaccination to keep us healthy. This event was an excellent example of the importance of Vaccination Week in keeping immunization programs at the top of the political agenda and thereby ensuring the commitment of governments to their national programs.

Dr. Carissa F. Etienne and Dr. Jarbas Barbosa da Silva Jr., the Director and Assistant Director of PAHO, respectively, started the virtual launch event with brief updates, and Dr. Barbosa gave a presentation on the progress VWA has made since the program’s inception and outlined the goals and objectives for the 19th annual VWA.

PAHO member countries also held similar virtual events to celebrate the start of the 19th Vaccination Week in the Americas, and some held scaled-back in-person events as well to promote immunization in the Region. Social media was a key delivery tool for PAHO and member states to reach the population during the COVID-19 pandemic. Live events on Facebook and Twitter were successful in garnering participation and supporting further engagement while many countries still had lockdowns and travel restrictions in place due to the pandemic.

The regional launch event closed with a presentation of the communication materials PAHO provided for the member states to use for their events and announced the collaboration with “Sesame Street” and Pelé. The communications plan also included information for live events on social media for further participation during the week.

PRIORITIZE VACCINATION AGAINST SEASONAL FLU

In order to protect the **most vulnerable populations, such as older adults, nursing home residents, people with chronic illnesses, and essential workers**, PAHO recommended that countries prioritize flu vaccination to avoid coinfections and overwhelming of health services dedicated to the COVID-19 response.

To avoid overcrowding of these groups in health facilities and reduce the risk of coming into contact with sick people, PAHO also recommended that countries implement alternative strategies such as establishing special and extended vaccination schedules, giving appointments, and installing vaccination booths in places other than health services (for example, in empty schools), among other measures.

**Twelve countries in the Region** used VWA to develop innovative vaccination strategies such as **staggered appointments or appointments with specific schedules, vaccinations in churches and banks, drive-through vaccinations, and vaccinations in nursing homes, empty religious buildings, and outdoor posts outside health centers.**



Vaccination in remote areas, Boquerón (Paraguay)  
© PAHO/WHO

**During VWA and other campaigns that lasted until mid-year, countries vaccinated over 210 million people in the Region, focusing particularly on priority groups: older adults, health care workers, people in high-risk occupations, pregnant people, people with preexisting conditions, and children under 5.**



Vaccination Week in the Americas in Capital District (Venezuela)  
© PAHO/WHO



Vaccination of older adults in Costa Rica  
© PAHO/WHO

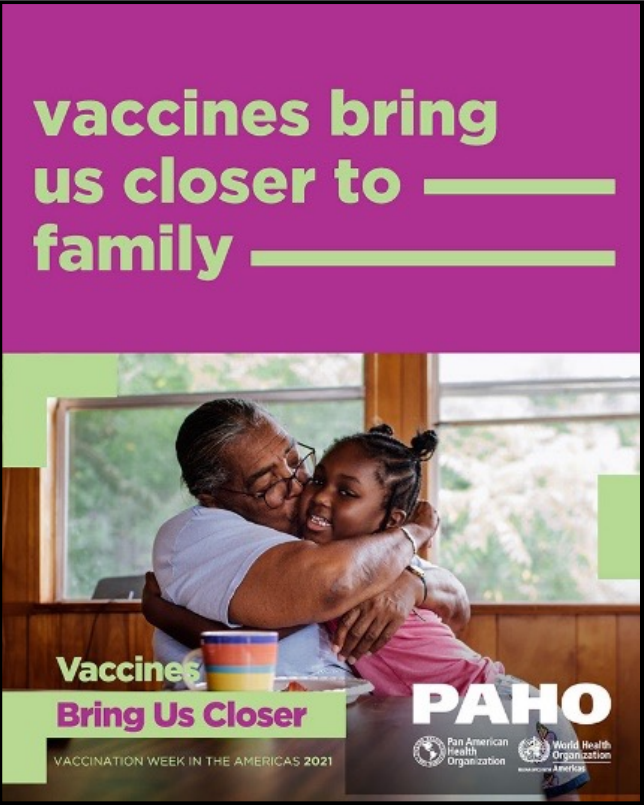
VWA 2021 CAMPAIGN RESULTS

The following results are based on the reports received by PAHO from 12 countries that participated in VWA 2021. These numbers do not reflect all people who were vaccinated under the umbrella of Vaccination Week, just the numbers received by PAHO.

Below are results based on the number of people vaccinated with different antigens.

Number of people vaccinated by antigen					
COVID-19	MMR	MR	Polio OPV	Polio IPV	Yellow Fever
137,409,870	2,713,433	40,051	490,473	113,385	9,086
Influenza	DTP	DT	Td	Hib	HepB
56,722,353	234,227	15,336	653,416	102,484	32,375
Pentavalent	BCG	RV	Pneumococcal	HPV	Others
188,489	44,575	111,240	106,089	57,519	50,722
Total			199,095,123		

Communication campaign



The regional slogan for the 2021 campaign was “Vaccines Bring Us Closer. #GetVax.” This year’s campaign is all about telling the stories of how vaccines bring us closer to the moments, people, and goals we care most about.



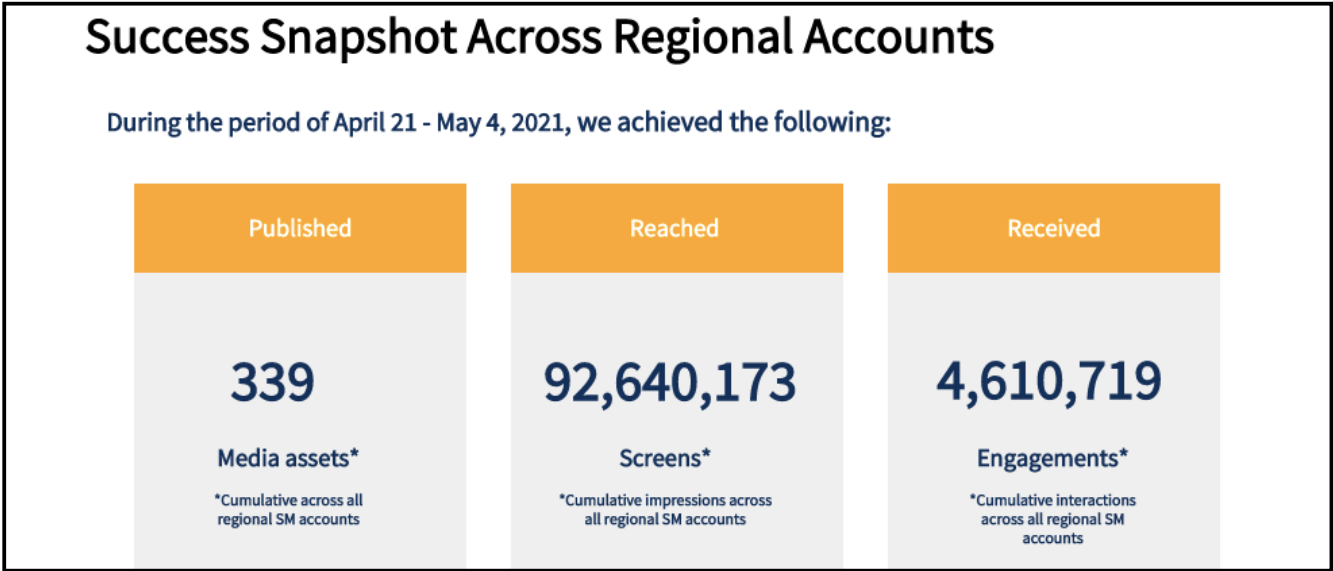
At the regional level, materials such as posters, social media cards, infographics, videos, and animations were prepared to support countries with their national VWA campaigns and for use as part of the regional campaign. The materials used photos that showed the great diversity of populations who all benefit from vaccination in the Americas.



SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

The social media campaign took place in PAHO’s regional Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn accounts. On these platforms, the VWA campaign had a wide reach among

the more than 900,000 combined followers. The campaign in PAHO’s regional accounts reached more than 92 million screens and generated over 4 million engagements.



Likewise, PAHO country offices’ social media accounts shared the different materials, allowing for a greater reach with key messages on the importance of vaccination, the safety

and efficacy of vaccines, and the role of immunization in protecting communities from dangerous diseases.



TWEET CHATS: LET’S TALK VACCINES

**Tweet chats** are public conversations on Twitter that allow people to connect from various backgrounds: the general public, academics, researchers, governments, and other key audiences.

For VWA 2021, **a Tweet chat with the general public was held to answer questions about COVID-19 vaccines and routine immunizations.**<sup>1</sup> PAHO addressed questions on a range of topics, including questions about the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines, how vaccines work, which COVID-19 vaccine is most effective, and the rapid development and production of COVID-19 vaccines. The Tweet chat offered a unique opportunity to respond to the questions and concerns of people from around the Region while also promoting the importance of vaccination as an essential service during the pandemic.

Interest in the VWA Tweet chat inspired new social media conversations between PAHO immunization experts and the public, which have continued throughout the year.

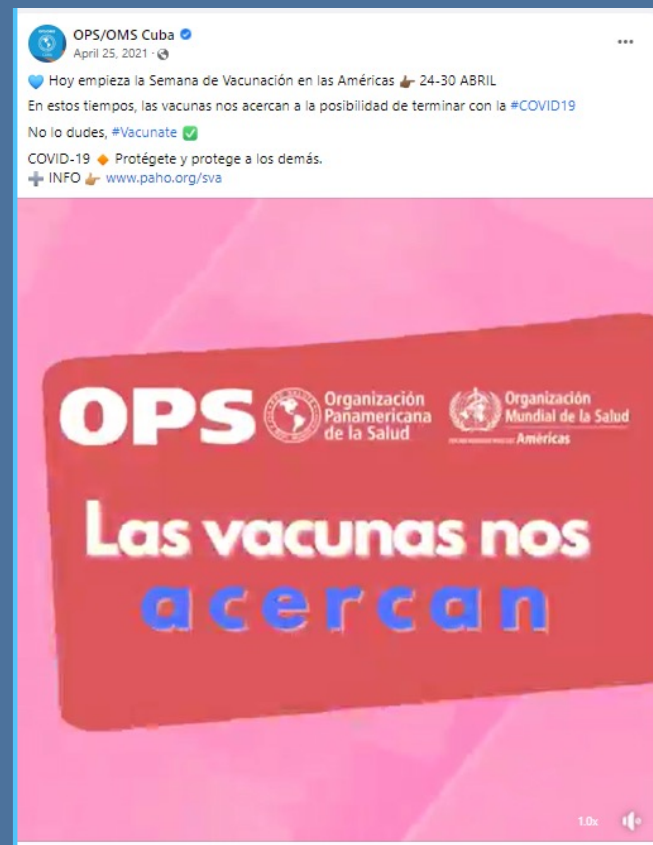
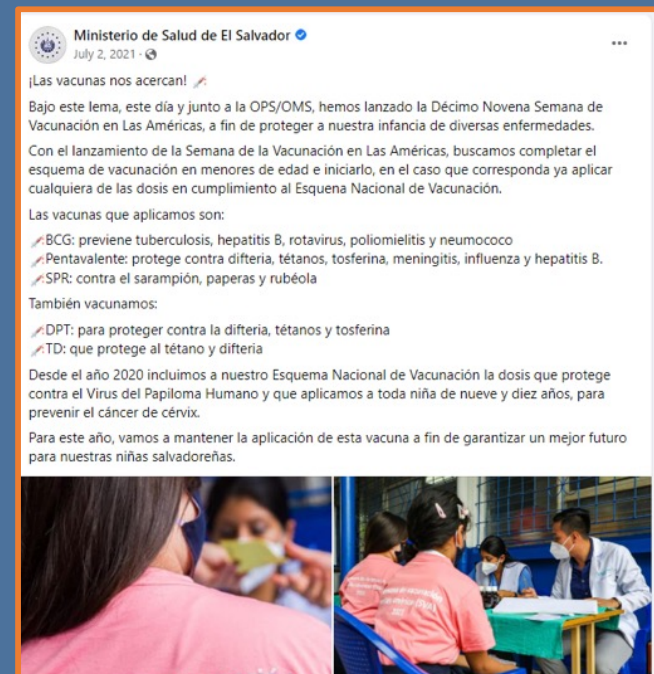


<sup>1</sup> For an example, see <https://twitter.com/pahowho/status/1387113541262626816>





## SOCIAL MEDIA IN COUNTRIES





COLLABORATION WITH “SESAME STREET”

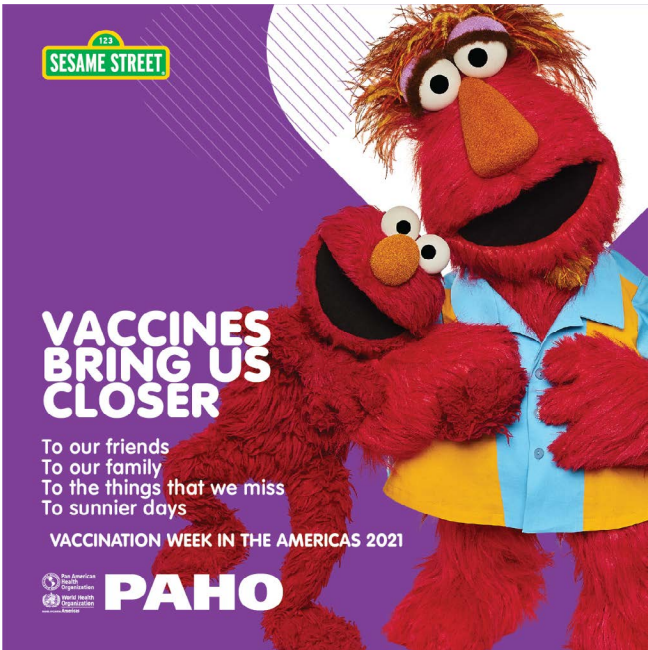
The famous children’s program “Sesame Street” spread the word about the importance of immunization for the 19th Vaccination Week in the Americas. This is not the first collaboration “Sesame Street” has done with PAHO to create public health educational content, as they worked together in the past on a campaign to educate children about the Zika virus in 2016 (10).

Several “Sesame Street” characters such as Big Bird, Elmo, and Rosita appeared in social media materials for the VWA promotional campaign. Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the “Sesame Street” program has become an increasingly vocal supporter of vaccines. This new collaboration firmly cements the program’s status as an internationally recognized supporter of routine immunization and public health measures.

“Sesame Street” joins the list of other programs, celebrities, and artists who have lent their voices to the Vaccination Week in the Americas campaign, including famed Brazilian children’s cartoon “Monica and Friends,” Jamaican Olympic



gold medalist Usain Bolt, Uruguayan soccer star Edinson Cavani, Chilean television star Don Francisco, and South American singer-songwriter Ricardo Montaner, among others.



COUNTRY STORIES

Bolivia. Vaccines in the time of COVID-19: Neighborhood leaders are the hub of vaccination in the Potosí mining district

During the COVID-19 pandemic, routine immunizations declined drastically, especially among children under 5 years of age. In Bolivia, community leaders and rural health centers have become the main administrators of vaccinations during COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted health systems development, including vaccinations. For example, this year Potosí recorded a nearly 20% decline in vaccine coverage in children under age 1 relative to the previous year. As of the end of October 2020, the Pailaviri Health Center had vaccinated 551 users at the facility, 403 individuals during campaigns, and another 445 in door-to-door visits to nearby areas.

Especially in the context of the pandemic, vaccine coverage largely depends on daily monitoring of children’s health records and the vaccine registry managed by Judith Canasa, as well as daily door-to-door visits by nursing aide Nelly Cruz.

[Read the full story here.](#)

Additional press

During VWA, PAHO specifically emphasized the topic of immunization with the media. PAHO’s Director defended immunization as an essential service during the pandemic in her weekly press briefing. Additionally, the following press releases were sent out:

- PAHO calls for closing vaccination gap generated by COVID-19 pandemic disruption. <https://www.paho.org/en/news/23-4-2021-paho-calls-closing-vaccination-gap-generated-covid-19-pandemic-disruption>



© PAHO/WHO



PAHO calls for closing vaccination gap generated by 19 pandemic disruption

23 Apr 2021



- Director’s remarks: Weekly press briefing on COVID-19. <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/paho-director-remarks-vacciantion-week-americas-2021-launch>
- Director’s remarks: Launch of Vaccination Week in the Americas. <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/paho-director-remarks-vacciantion-week-americas-2021-launch>



# World Immunization Week



Following the successes of Vaccination Week in the Americas, other WHO regions started similar initiatives, each adapted to the realities of their respective countries and territories.

In 2012, this global movement culminated in the establishment of World Immunization Week (WIW).<sup>2</sup> Each year, WIW in conjunction with VWA, countries have come together to raise awareness on the importance of immunization and to vaccinate different populations across the globe, making a special effort to reach people who may not have regular access to health services, including indigenous peoples, migrants, border populations, and people living in rural/urban fringes.

WIW was endorsed at the 65th World Health Assembly (WHA) in May 2012 through Resolution 65.18 (11) and is officially held during the last week of April each year.

The main goal of the campaign is to urge greater engagement around immunization globally and the importance of vaccination in improving the health and well-being of everyone, everywhere throughout life.

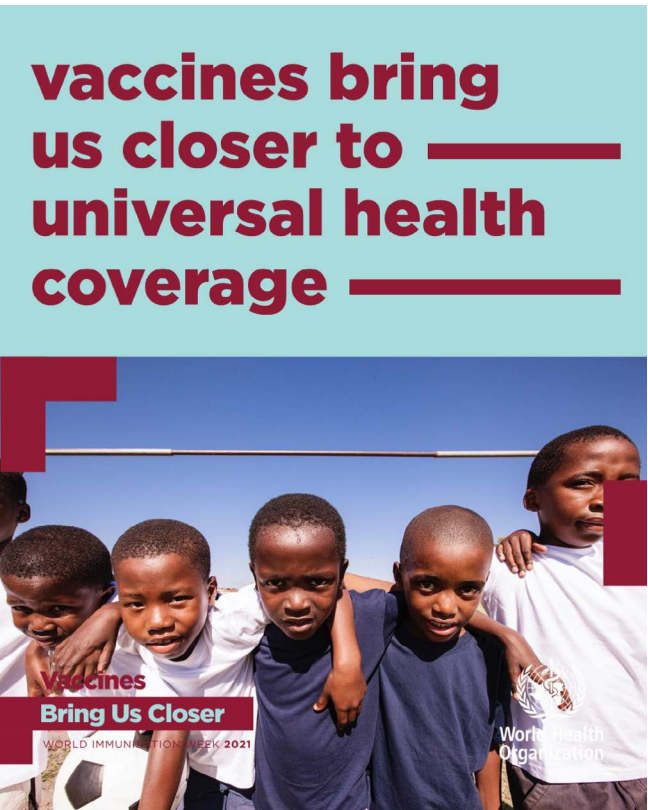
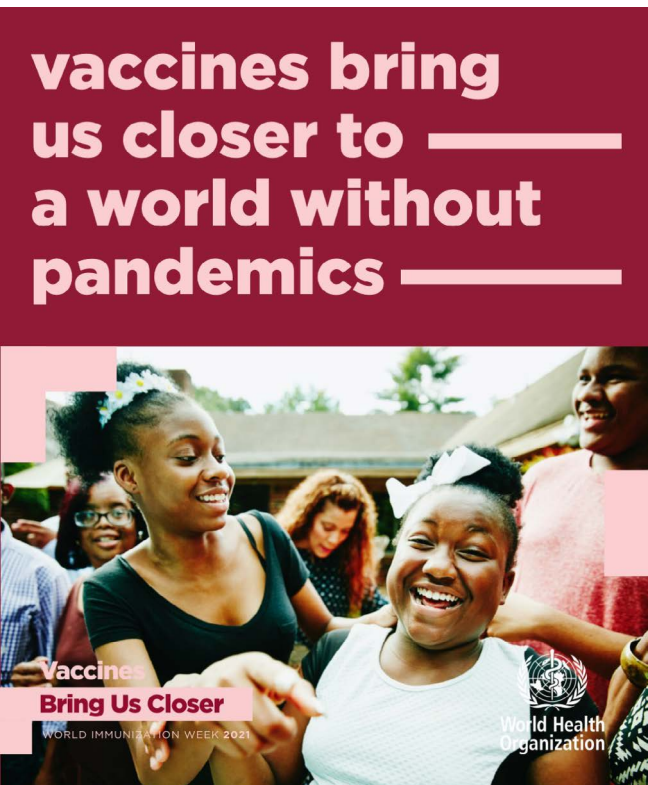
<sup>2</sup> For more information on World Immunization Week, visit <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-immunization-week/2021>



## 2021 CAMPAIGN

With the slogan “Vaccines Bring Us Closer” and the social media tag #VaccinesWork, the WIW campaign took place April 24-30, 2021, with a focus on how vaccines will help us progress on a path to a world where we can be together again after a year of fighting the devastating COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccines are a critical new tool in the battle against COVID-19. Working as quickly as they can, scientists from across the world are collaborating and innovating to bring us tests, treatments, and vaccines that will collectively save lives and end this pandemic. Vaccines themselves continue to advance, bringing us closer to a world free from the likes of tuberculosis and cervical cancer and ending suffering from childhood diseases such as tetanus and measles.

- Reframe the global vaccine conversation to focus on the importance of vaccines.
- Highlight the many ways in which vaccines enable us to live healthy, productive lives by preventing the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Demonstrate social proof that the broader public already values and trusts vaccines.
- This year’s campaign looks to build solidarity and trust in vaccination as a public good that saves lives and protects health. To this end, we will be seeking more partners to join us, bringing people together in support of a life-saving cause.





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# PAHO



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World Health  
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**PAHO/FPL/IM/COVID-19/22-0008**

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