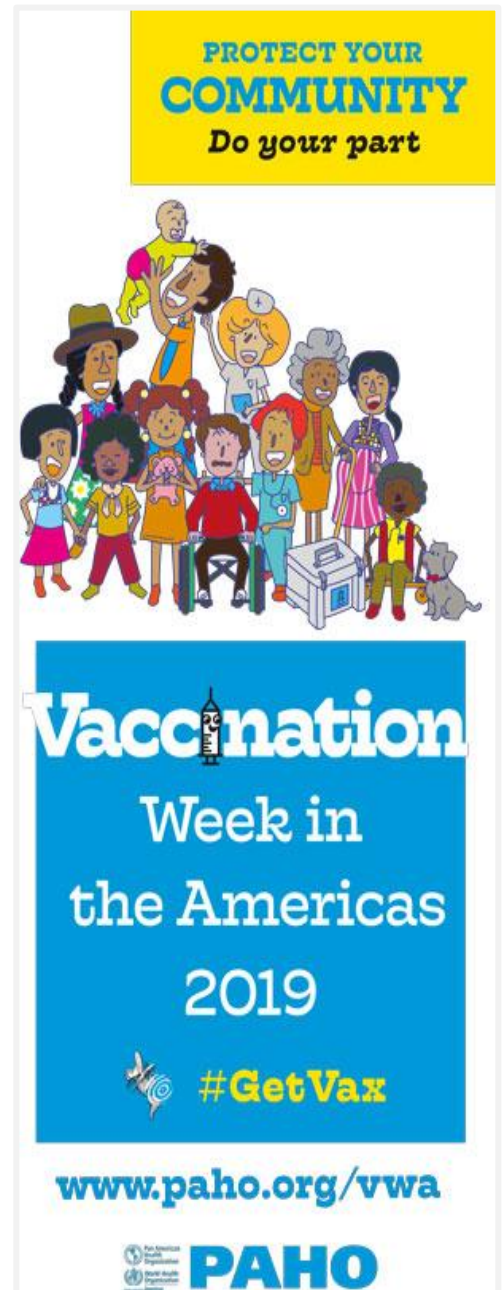


REGIONAL LAUNCH OF VACCINATION WEEK IN THE AMERICAS

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22 APRIL 2019 - CUIABÁ, BRAZIL

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HONORABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH OF BRAZIL
- MR. MAURO MENDES FERREIRA
GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF MATO GROSSO
- MR. EMANUEL PINHEIRO
MAYOR OF THE CITY OF CUIABÁ
- DR. GILBERTO FIGUEIREDO
SECRETARY OF HEALTH OF THE STATE OF MATO GROSSO
- DR. LUIZ ANTÔNIO POSSAS DE CARVALHO
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- DISTINGUISHED REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MINISTRIES OF
HEALTH OF COLOMBIA, PARAGUAY AND BOLIVIA
- DR. AKIRA HOMMA
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PAHO TAG ON IMMUNIZATION
- REPRESENTATIVES OF UNICEF, ROTARY INTERNATIONAL
AND THE US EMBASSY IN BRAZIL
- HONORABLE PARLIAMENTARIANS
- REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MEDIA
- FELLOW PAHO COLLEAGUES
- ESTEEMED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN



A very Good Morning to You All

Bom Dia

It is with immense pleasure that I stand here with you today in Cuiabá, the capital city of the State of Mato Grosso, Brazil to launch the **17th Vaccination Week in the Americas**. Seventeen years on the regional public health stage has not only allowed us to reach and protect more people through immunization and, consequently, to save lives, but also to improve and benefit from the many lessons learned over this time. It is with pride that we must record that **since the inception of Vaccination Week in the Americas, more than 740 million people of all ages have been vaccinated against a wide range of diseases through this specific initiative.**

While today we celebrate the benefits of vaccination here in Brazil, I would like to assure you that similar launch events are taking place in every other country of the Americas. Furthermore, I would like to point out that we are not alone in this observance as **global solidarity has united other Regions, countries, and communities around the world to participate in World Immunization Week for the specific purpose of promoting vaccination and re-affirming its value as one of the most powerful and effective tools in our public health armamentarium.**

I would like to emphasize that vaccinations keep our populations safe from serious diseases, such as measles, influenza, poliomyelitis and cervical cancer due to the human papilloma viruses. It is estimated that **around 70 million people will be vaccinated in the Americas under the framework of the 2019 Vaccination Week.**

Before proceeding further, I would like to convey my sincerest congratulations to the Government of Brazil for establishing increased immunization coverage as one of its 35 strategic health priorities for the country. Thank you very much for your dedicated commitment to immunization as well as for generously hosting this 2019 Regional Launch of Vaccination Week in the Americas.

Your national immunization program is one of the most solid pillars of Brazil's Unified Health System- Your SUS. Your Immunization Program has not only contributed to the eradication of smallpox and poliomyelitis in the Americas, but it has also been responsible for a significant reduction in deaths and complications from communicable diseases - a highly commendable achievement.

Indeed, **we recognize that the task of vaccinating 209 million persons residing in Brazil's 5,570 municipalities and 34 Indigenous Sanitary**

[Districts cannot be a simple one](#). However, we have many very good and tangible examples, including those from the recent outbreaks of yellow fever and measles, of how [Brazil utilizes its technical expertise and solid public health experience to effectively respond to these outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases](#). Your country is internationally recognized for its national immunization program, which was created some 45 years ago and which has had many accomplishments that have benefited not only Brazil, but the Americas and indeed the whole world.

[The Region of the Americas has had a distinguished history in leading the way to the elimination of vaccine-preventable diseases](#). Ours was the first of all WHO Regions to [eradicate smallpox in 1974](#). Ours was also the first Region to [eliminate poliomyelitis in 1994](#). After 22 years of arduous work in solid collaboration with every country in the Americas and with our strategic partners, our Region successfully [eliminated rubella and congenital rubella syndrome in 2015](#) and [measles in 2016](#).

I must pause here to record that PAHO's achievements in building a successful [Regional Expanded Program on Immunization](#); in the development and refinement of our strategic vision for the elimination of vaccine-preventable diseases; and in the development and growth of the [PAHO's Revolving Fund for Vaccines](#) were some of the successful

products of the visionary leadership, strategic thinking and innovative actions of the late Dr. Ciro Carlos Araujo de Quadros, a son of this Brazilian soil, having been born in Rio Pardo. We must appreciate that the accomplishments which we have achieved to-date as a region, represent a continuing accumulation of successes that have been reached through the meticulous hard work and dedicated commitment of others, such as Ciro, who have gone before us.

Regrettably, as you all may be aware, [the Region of the Americas is now facing some difficult challenges, including a resurgence of measles outbreaks and diphtheria as well as the occurrence of yellow fever.](#)

[Measles remains a public health problem in all other WHO regions and imported cases from those regions have posed and continue to pose a real and significant threat to the countries of the Americas, where more than 17,000 cases have been recorded since 2017.](#) We are also observing an expansion in the numbers of non-vaccinated persons due to [misinformation, philosophical and religious beliefs as well as the apparently effective negative impact of anti-vaccine campaigns promulgated via the social media.](#)

We can and must stop measles transmission. Only by working together across borders and in the spirit of true Pan-Americanism will we be able to regain the measles-free status of our Region. The actions that we must take to halt the spread of measles are very clear.

First and foremost, **we must increase vaccination coverage so that at least 95 percent of the population** in every municipality, community, nook and cranny has received the measles vaccine. This must invariably include health care workers and populations living in vulnerable situations. Secondly, **we must strengthen national epidemiological surveillance** in order to allow for the early identification of suspected cases and we must be ready to quickly intervene by creating rapid response teams that can effectively manage suspected cases, thwart new cases as well as prevent nosocomial transmission.

In this age, where misinformation is as readily available as are the actual facts, and where misinformation can be *dressed up* or manipulated to be believably factual, **it is imperative for all of us to become tireless advocates for immunization,** never missing the opportunity to defend the life-saving power of vaccines and to assure our communities that vaccination is safe and effective.

Immunization is also great equalizer as we each benefit from the protection it offers, whether we are young or old, rich or poor, or an urban or rural resident. However, **in order for us to fully enjoy the maximum protection conferred by vaccination, we must ensure that all populations are vaccinated-** as is their right- through special outreach efforts to persons in remote areas, poor neighborhoods, indigenous populations, migrants, individuals who may not have regular contact with health systems and those residing under fragile circumstances. As we look towards the achievement of the [2030 Sustainable Development Goals](#), **we must ensure that no one will be left behind**, where immunization is concerned.

Immunization is also a key entry point to primary health care for many populations. **Vaccination Week** itself serves as an ideal platform for integrating other health-related activities such as deworming, blood testing, BMI evaluations, diabetes screening and breastfeeding promotion, just to name a few.

The slogan for this year's Vaccination Week is – *'Protect your community. Do your part. Get vaccinated because vaccines work.'*

It is the duty of each one of us here today to do our part to promote vaccination regardless of our specific functions and roles. Let me assure

you that I am a strong advocate for vaccination not just in my capacity as the Director of the Pan American Health Organization, but also as a physician, a community member and a grandmother.

Doing our part as health care workers and health authorities means going beyond our individual functions- to work with others who also have a role to play in supporting vaccination- be they mayors, teachers, parents, journalists, or community leaders. Only when everyone does his or her part will we achieve that high immunization coverage at the local level, a key requisite for preventing and stopping outbreaks. I, therefore, invite you to thoughtfully consider how you can do *your* part to strengthen immunization activities and protect your community, friends and family with vaccination- and then do it!

As I close, I urge you all to recommit and re-intensify the fight against measles. We know that we can stop measles. We have done it before, but we must do it again as millions of unvaccinated children around the world are counting on us. I give you my firm commitment that PAHO will stand with you in this fight and together we will win another victory.

I, hereby, launch the 2019 Vaccination Week in the Americas from Cuiaba, Brazil.

Thank you all very much.

Obrigada.