

# Ensuring steady levels of vaccination against eradicated or almost eradicated diseases world-wide

## Background

To get rid of something completely or to destroy something bad by definition means to eradicate.<sup>1</sup> In the medical field, the definition of eradication is perhaps more precise: “Eradication is permanent reduction to zero of the worldwide incidence of infection caused by a specific agent as a result of deliberate efforts; intervention measures are no longer needed.”<sup>2</sup>

In other words, to eradicate a disease means to completely eliminate its spread in the population. According to many professionals, it is our key to a safe and healthy future.

Throughout history we have been able to eradicate two diseases completely. The first was smallpox in 1980, the second was rinderpest in 2011 (however, the latter does not affect humans, thus is not primarily relevant for WHO).<sup>3</sup> Apart from completely eradicating smallpox and rinderpest, WHO and other experts in the field believe our population is, with adequate measures, capable of eradicating several other diseases. Such an example can be polio, measles or tetanus – they have been eradicated in many parts of the world and are almost eradicated in others.

However, eradication of said diseases is not straight away a natural process. Consequently, we need to put previously mentioned adequate measures into practice (and keep the already existing) to eliminate the spread of pathogens or to prevent their reappearance.

It is stated with certainty that one of the most effective methods of preventing the spread of diseases is vaccination.<sup>4</sup> In addition, other methods can be helpful as well

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<sup>1</sup> The principles of disease elimination and eradication. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [online]. [Accessed 11 January 2023]. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/su48a7.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Eradication. Cambridge Dictionary [online]. [Accessed 11 January 2023]. Available from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/eradication>.

<sup>3</sup> ROSER, Max, OCHMANN, Sophie, BEHRENS, Hannah, RITCHIE, Hannah and DADONAITE, Bernadeta. Eradication of diseases. Our World in Data [online]. 3 June 2014. [Accessed 11 January 2023]. Available from: <https://ourworldindata.org/eradication-of-diseases#disease-eradication-is-an-ongoing-process>.

<sup>4</sup> Vaccines and immunization: What is vaccination? World Health Organization [online]. [Accessed 14 January 2023]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/vaccines-and-immunization-what-is-vaccination>.

(e.g. satisfactory hygiene measures (especially in developing nations)), but they prove to be rather an accompanying measure.

Despite the effectiveness of vaccines, the global immunization coverage is dropping (from 86% in 2019 to 81% in 2021).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, more than 25 million children are estimated to not have received basic vaccines. More than 60% of these children then live in the following 10 countries (Angola, Brazil, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan and the Philippines).

It remains crucial to reach global levels of vaccination, amongst children as well as adults, to ensure a development in the eradication of diseases – and to save lives.

## UN involvement

WHO is closely working with countries and partners to help solve this vaccination issue. The World Health Assembly has adopted an Immunization Agenda 2030 (IA2030) and has created a global vision for vaccines and immunization. IA2030 develops many aspects of the problematic in detail – such as how to make vaccines accessible, how to provide primary care to everyone, or how to educate the general public on the benefits of vaccination.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, WHO's actions for the eradication of smallpox (in the 20<sup>th</sup> century) served as a launching pad to further deepen global cooperation. UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) has also played an important role when assisting in the distribution of vaccines, for example.

Lately, WHO (or rather the World Health Assembly) has been closely monitoring the supply and distribution of Covid-19 vaccines. Other diseases were partially set aside due to the pandemic. WHO is however returning to its pre-pandemic concerns and resuming postponed actions.

At the 75<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly held in Geneva in May of 2022 the main focus, right after ending the pandemic, became the eradication of meningitis. 194 countries collectively resolved to end the suffering from meningitis, as previously stated in resolution WHA73.9. The Director-General of WHO also launched a "Defeating Meningitis by 2030: Global Road Map" program.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/immunization-coverage>

<sup>6</sup> LEE, Alex. Immunization agenda 2030. Immunization Agenda 2030 [online]. [Accessed 14 January 2023]. Available from: <https://www.immunizationagenda2030.org/>.

## Useful links

Immunization Agenda 2030: <https://www.immunizationagenda2030.org>

Resolution WHA73.9 (from November 2020):

[https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA73/A73\\_R9-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA73/A73_R9-en.pdf)

WHO – Vaccines and immunization (a brief Q&A):

<https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/vaccines-and-immunization-what-is-vaccination>

Our World in Data (overview of the history of eradication):

<https://ourworldindata.org/eradication-of-diseases#useful-references>

## Questions to consider

1. Is the population of my country vaccinated (respectively: what percentage of the population is vaccinated)? If not, which vaccines have the smallest percentage of vaccinated?
2. What is the main vaccination-related issue in my country? Is it the lack of vaccines, finances? Is the vaccine education (their importance, their possible risks) not effective or accessible?
3. Can my country do more to make vaccines accessible? Can my country help other countries with vaccination/does my country need help?
4. Is my country involved with WHO's, UNICEF's or other organization's support program (such as IA2030)?

## Sources

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