

Expanding Universal Access to Vaccines Subcommittee Topic Briefing

Topic Overview

Vaccines are critical to good health and well-being, and ensuring that everyone is vaccinated against deadly diseases is one of the United Nations biggest health-related goals. Vaccines grant people **immunity** to diseases such as diphtheria, measles, polio, and tetanus, which all have the potential to be deadly if untreated. According to UNICEF, vaccines prevent between two to three million deaths each year. For decades, **universal** immunization has been the goal of the United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO). A successful immunization campaign carried out by the WHO from 1967 to 1977 eradicated smallpox and since 1988, the WHO and its partners have almost eradicated polio through the near-universal vaccinations, with infections falling by 99%. In addition, the measles vaccine led to a 73% decline in measles-related deaths from 2000 to 2018, saving more than 23 million lives.¹ In short, vaccines are safe, reliable, and some of the global health community's greatest tools in promoting good health and well-being.

The WHO monitors global immunization and established the goal of universal immunization in 1977.² Although immunization rates around the world are higher today than ever before, much work remains. Each year, approximately 1.5 million people die from diseases that could have been prevented with proper immunization and in 2019, approximately 14 million infants did not receive any vaccines.³ A lack of access to vaccines is often a product of social and economic inequalities, leaving those living in developing countries with trouble accessing vaccinations due to cost, inadequate healthcare facilities, or an absence of education on the importance of vaccines.

Furthermore, COVID-19 now represents an additional barrier to achieving universal vaccination. Not only is there a dire need for a COVID-19 vaccine to stop the spread of the virus, but the attention and resources that have been used by governments and healthcare facilities in response to the pandemic have taken away from the hard-won progress that has been made in delivering affordable vaccinations worldwide. Stay at home orders, financial hardship, transportation disruptions, and a fear of visiting a doctor's office or healthcare facility caused by the pandemic often make it difficult for people to receive the vaccines that they need. Some fear that the negative impact of children missing their routine vaccinations due to the pandemic will be worse than the impact of the pandemic itself in the long-run. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted now, more than ever, how critical universal access to vaccines is for global health and well-being.⁴

¹ Immunization - UNICEF <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/immunization/>

² The Expanded Programme on Immunization - World Health Organization
https://www.who.int/immunization/programmes_systems/supply_chain/benefits_of_immunization/en/

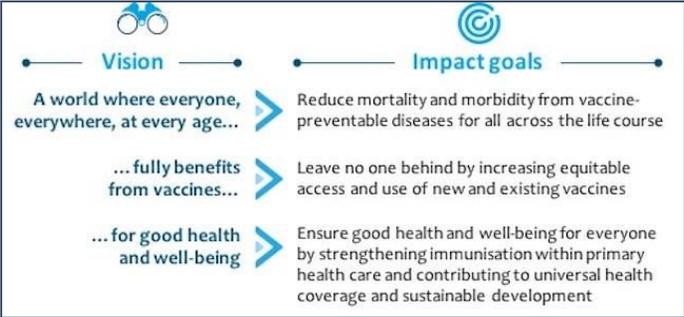
³ Immunization Programme - UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org/immunization>

⁴ WHO and UNICEF Warn of a Decline in Vaccinations During COVID-19 - UNICEF
<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/who-and-unicef-warn-decline-vaccinations-during-covid-19>



Target 3.B - Expanding Universal Access to Vaccines

SDG Target 3.B aims to “support the research and development of vaccines and medicines for the communicable and **noncommunicable diseases** that primarily affect developing countries.” Vaccines save millions of lives every year, but are still not accessible to everyone around the world. Developed countries, like the United States, European countries, South Korea, and Japan, have been successful in near-universal vaccination of children. But children from developing countries are unvaccinated in much higher numbers due to factors such as poverty, lack of education regarding the importance of vaccines, inadequate healthcare facilities, and war and conflict. Just ten countries worldwide account for 62% of unvaccinated children: Nigeria, India, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Brazil, Philippines, Indonesia, Angola, and Mexico.⁵ In order to achieve the goal of universal vaccinations, UNICEF is calling on governments and donors to invest in quality health systems that deliver quality and affordable immunizations to all children, and on technology companies to promote credible and scientifically proven information about vaccines.⁶



IA 2030 Vision and Impact Goals

One way the UN seeks to achieve Target 3.B is through the Immunization Agenda 2030 (IA2030). IA2030 is an agenda created by countries and organizations around the world with the goal of ensuring that “everyone, everywhere, at every age, fully benefits from vaccines for good health and well-being.”⁷ In order to be most effective, IA2030 will be tailored to each participating country, with country-specific goals and targets for the distribution of vaccines. Partner organizations will then align their strategies and support to aid in these goals.⁸ Developing and developed countries alike should work together toward the goals of IA2030.

As mentioned, those who stand to benefit the most from increased vaccinations are the most vulnerable members of our society, namely children, those suffering from significant social and economic inequalities, poverty, and war. Vaccines are a simple, **preventive** measure meant to protect entire communities and countries from deadly diseases that require serious medical attention. The challenges to universal vaccination presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, are significant, and global health advocates have stated their concern around the ability to provide vaccinations during a global pandemic.

⁵ Progress and Challenges with Achieving Universal Immunization Coverage - World Health Organization https://www.who.int/immunization/monitoring_surveillance/who-immuniz.pdf
⁶ Remarks by Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director, at the opening of a UN high-level event to tackle misinformation and champion children’s right to immunization, New York - UNICEF <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/remarks-henrietta-fore-unicef-executive-director-opening-un-high-level-event-tackle>
⁷ Immunization Coverage - World Health Organization <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/immunization-coverage>
⁸ Immunization Agenda 2030: A Global Strategy to Leave No One Behind - World Health Organization https://www.who.int/immunization/immunization_agenda_2030/en/

Quick Facts

Find at least three quick facts on universal access to vaccines from this briefing paper. Quick facts should be about one sentence long and provide useful information on the subcommittee topic. A good example of a quick fact is a statistic related to the topic.

1. Quick Fact:
2. Quick Fact:
3. Quick Fact:

Questions to Consider

Use the information provided in the briefing paper above, as well as your own research on your assigned country, to answer the questions below.

1. Why is universal vaccinations critical in achieving the overall goal of Ensuring Good Health and Promoting Well-Being for All?
2. What are some of the reasons that people may not get vaccinated against deadly diseases?
3. How well does your assigned country do in providing vaccinations for all its citizens? What are some of the major reasons your country does well or does not do well in providing vaccinations?
(Data on vaccinations by country can be found on this site:
<https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/immunization/>)

Glossary

Term	Description
Immunity	Protection from an infectious disease. If you are immune to a disease, you can be exposed to it without becoming infected.
Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs)	Also known as chronic diseases, tend to be of long duration and are the result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behaviours factors.
Universal	Covering everyone and everything without limit or exception.
Preventive Medicine	Strategies to prevent disease and illness from starting, including vaccinations. Preventing a disease or illness is significantly easier and cheaper than helping someone back to full health.