

This week is African Vaccination Week

As part World Immunization Week, African Vaccination Week, being celebrated from 22-27 April 2014, has the theme 'Vaccination - a shared responsibility'. It highlights the role and importance of everyone to fight against the vaccine-preventable diseases such as pertussis, measles, tetanus, diphtheria, influenza, rotavirus diarrhoea, pneumonia, viral hepatitis and cancers associated with HPV (Human Papilloma Virus infections causing cervical, vulvar and vaginal cancers).



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The efficacy of vaccines and their impact on public health are no longer questioned. They have contributed to the prevention of more than 25 circulating infectious diseases and have allowed avoiding a large number of long-term handicaps. Likewise, the number of spared deaths each year is estimated at about 2 to 3 million every year, thanks to immunisation.

However, despite the progress in Africa, many challenges remain. The advantages of vaccination should be extended beyond children to include teenagers and adults, to provide protection against deadly diseases such as, meningitis, diarrhoea or cancers associated with HPV). In Africa, a woman dies every 8 hours because of cancer, deaths that we can avoid today thanks to early immunisation.

HPV infection is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STI), at least half of sexually active individuals encounter HPV during their lifetime. Any sexual contact is associated with a risk of infection. Having a cutaneous and mucosal transmissible nature, HPV infection might occur despite condom use; hence vaccination proves to be important.

"MSD (Merck Sharp & Dohme) is proud to support World Immunization Week in Africa, which provides an important opportunity to raise awareness about the public health impact of vaccination," said Dr Soren Bo Christiansen, president of the company's Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa region. "Vaccines are one of the greatest public health stories in history and the company has played its part in that story. For more than 50 years, our scientists have helped prevent now-rare diseases such as measles and mumps, as well as diseases never thought preventable such as shingles and cervical cancer. Our commitment to protecting human health by ensuring availability and accessibility of vaccines is vital to our mission as a company."

With the participation of more than 180 countries, territories and regions around the globe, the World Immunization Week aims at issuing a reminder that vaccines help fight a large number of infectious diseases and calls for action to improve immunisation coverage for all age individuals.

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