

## Africa 'Polio Free' campaign gains momentum

MSD, known as Merck & Co in the United States and Canada, has added its voice to the World Health Organization (WHO) campaign to promote the use of vaccines against some of the world's deadliest diseases, and for countries to strengthen immunisation services and systems. World Immunization Week, a global awareness campaign launched by WHO in 2012 and commemorated in the last week of April, aims to promote the use of vaccines to help protect people of all ages against disease.



For the second year running, the 'Close the Immunization Gap' campaign will be celebrating the achievements to date with an emphasis on the unmet need amongst adolescents and adult vaccine uptake.

The theme for African Vaccination Week 2016 is 'Close the immunization gap. Stay polio free!' (#AVW16), focusing attention on the need to attain universal immunization coverage in the African region. The theme also marks the celebration of the important polio eradication milestone that has been reached in the African region, and calls on African countries to stay vigilant in the fight against polio, and stay polio free.

"Vaccines are one of the greatest public health success stories in history. For more than 100 years, our scientists have been discovering vaccines that have been impacting lives. By helping healthy people stay healthy, vaccines remove a major barrier to human and economic development," said Farouk Shamas Jiwa, sub-Saharan Africa director for Policy and Corporate Responsibility at MSD.

Africa has made several gains beyond increasing reach of immunisation; some diseases have been eliminated through wide-scale immunisation programmes. Vaccines are available in public vaccination programmes in the vast majority of African countries, thanks to sustained political will, international support and innovative public/private partnerships.

Despite recent progress within African countries, there are still significant opportunities provided by immunisation, particularly to help protect against human papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cancer.

“We must continue to build on the wonderful momentum we have. It will take a collective,

collaborative effort involving governments, donors, patient organisations, healthcare professionals, NGOs, multilateral organisations and others in the private sector – to increase access to life-saving vaccines and to strengthen immunisation programmes.

“Preventing disease through vaccination is about securing the future - in particular for African women and girls. Our goal is to sustain and improve the quality of life and health of communities and countries across Africa. Our commitment is steadfast as we work to increase access to vaccines now and in the future,” Jiwa added.

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