

## **Pediatricians from Disease Conference Call for Children's Vaccine Fund**

Addustour (Amman)

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More than 1,000 pediatricians and experts from around the world participated in *The Second Meeting on Immunization in the Arab World for the Coming Decade*, an event held in Amman that named "vaccination the right of all children everywhere."

Participants called for the creation of a fund to support vaccination programs in the Arab world and urged politicians to eliminate obstacles preventing the inclusion of all new vaccines in such programs. The need for change is clear: international statistics and studies indicate that in the Arab world 8,000 children die yearly from meningitis and more than 1 million children are affected by pneumonia. 50,000 of these children die yearly.

Vaccination has drastically reduced many childhood diseases across the Arab region, but striking inequalities persist. However, while wealthy nations can afford to regularly update vaccination programs and poor countries can apply for international financial assistance, middle-income Arab countries often struggle to introduce new vaccines into their national immunization programs. As a result, children in these countries remain unprotected against preventable diseases and are vulnerable to death and disability.

"Although infectious disease spreads easily across borders in this integrated region, only children from the wealthiest countries of the Arab region generally have guaranteed access to these important vaccines," said Dr. Najwa Khuri-Bulos, chair of Union of Arab Pediatricians Infectious Disease Committee, and pediatrics professor at the Jordan University Hospital. "Infectious disease does not respect borders—a disease outbreak in a poor Arab country could easily affect even the richest and most advanced countries in the region."

"Nearly all life-threatening meningitis is preventable with Hib, pneumococcal and meningococcal vaccine," said Dr. Rana Hajjeh, Director of the Hib Initiative, and Director of the Bacterial Diseases Division at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, USA. "We need to ensure that all Arab countries are able to provide these life-saving vaccines to their children—if we fail, children will continue to die needlessly or develop severe complications from these diseases."

"Vaccines are also an incredibly economical means of improving the health and wellbeing of all. By preventing illness, they reduce the burden on health care systems and help families save money on medical expenses, allowing them to make other investments," said Dr. Ciro de Quadros, Executive Vice President of the Sabin Vaccine Institute in Washington, D.C, referring to the Latin-American experience. "Healthy children perform better in school and grow up to be productive adults."

"WHO and international experts are convinced that vaccines should be available to all

children, and Arab policy makers must work to prioritize this on their countries' agendas," said Mr. Miloud Kaddar, Senior health economist at WHO.

Vaccination for the Next Decade in the Arab World is organized by The Arab Pediatric Association, in conjunction with the Union of Arab Pediatricians, the Pan Arab Pediatric Infectious Disease Society, and leading international experts on child survival and vaccines from the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, UNICEF, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Sabin Vaccine Institute and the Harvard School of Public Health. The conference has the patronage and support of Jordan's Minister of Health.