



## WAHO Statement on the Occasion of World Immunisation Week 2021

**Bobo-Dioulasso 24-30 April 2021** – the World Immunisation Week (WIW) is an annual event that has been celebrated during the last week of April for the past ten years around the world. The goal of the WIW is to promote the use of vaccines to protect people of all ages against disease. Immunisation saves millions of lives every year and is widely recognized as one of the world's most successful health interventions.

This year's celebration will be marked under the theme "***Vaccines bring us closer***". The objective is to stimulate greater engagement around immunisation globally to promote the importance of vaccination in bringing people together, and improving the health and wellbeing of everyone, everywhere throughout life. Yet, there are still nearly 20 million children in the world today who are not getting the vaccines they need, and many who miss out on vital vaccines during adolescence, adulthood and into old age.

As part of the 2021 campaign, the World Health Organization (WHO), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), partners and individuals around the world will unite to advocate increase in our:

- trust and confidence in vaccines to maintain or increase vaccine acceptance.
- investment in vaccines, including routine immunisation, to remove barriers to access.

The WIW 2021 is being marked at a time when the world is focusing on critically important new vaccines to protect against COVID-19. In this regard, African Leaders recently met on 12 and 13 April 2021 to agree a roadmap on expanding Africa's Vaccine Manufacturing capacity. The vision is to ensure Africa has timely access to vaccines to protect public health security, by establishing a sustainable vaccine development and manufacturing ecosystem in Africa and setting up a new public health order aimed at:

- Strengthening public health institutions
- Expanding manufacturing of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics
- Fostering respectful action-oriented partnerships
- Strengthening public health workforce

In January 2017, the Heads of State from across Africa signed the Addis Declaration on Immunisation (ADI) and committed to ensuring that everyone in Africa, no matter who they are or where they live, can equitably access all the required and needed vaccines.

While significant progress has been made notably in Smallpox eradication and improvement in global immunisation coverage with the third dose of DTP (diphtheria–tetanus–pertussis) vaccine that quadrupled, climbing to 84% by 2010, there are some unmet objectives:

- too slow progress towards achieving the eradication of wild poliovirus and the elimination of measles, rubella, and maternal and neonatal tetanus by the end of the decade;

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**About the West African Health Organization (WAHO):** WAHO is the specialized institution of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) responsible for health issues. Its mission is to attain the highest possible standard and protection of health of the peoples in the sub-region through the harmonization of the policies of the Member States, pooling of resources, and cooperation with one another and with others for a collective and strategic fight against the health problems of the sub-region.

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- stagnation or decline in routine immunisation coverage in recent years in our region, with the COVID-19 pandemic threatening to reverse the gains made and consequent risk of serious diseases like measles and poliomyelitis.

As part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Heads of States in the ECOWAS Region agreed to take steps to improve access to COVID-19 vaccines through the establishment of a regional fund, pooled procurement and local production of vaccines. They directed that vaccine campaigns should start, at the latest, by end of June 2021.

WAHO continues to work tirelessly to support countries in strengthening their National Immunisation Technical Advisory Groups (NITAGs) and in building resilient health systems to enable them better fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine-preventable diseases.

As at 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021, 12 of the 15 ECOWAS countries have started COVID-19 vaccination while the remaining three countries are in the advanced phase of preparation. As in other parts of Africa, far too few of the ECOWAS population has so far been vaccinated to enable it reach the herd immunity for which our region still need almost 400 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines.

To ensure the equitable and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines in our region, it is critical to build solidarity and trust in vaccination as a public good that saves lives and protects health. As HE President Paul Kagame has said: *“Vaccine equity cannot be guaranteed by goodwill alone, as we have seen many examples to convince all of us. Africa needs to expand production capacity for vaccines and other essential medical products.”*

On the occasion of the WIW, WAHO would like to thank ECOWAS Commission, the Member States and Partners including Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (A-CDC), WHO, the COVAX Facility Initiative, bilateral and multilateral organizations, donors, NGOs, the civil society and the media for their commitments to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and their support for the Immunisation Agenda 2030.

***“Vaccines bring us closer”!***

***“Vaccinated communities, Healthy communities”!***

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