



CARPHA Headquarters

Caribbean Public Health Agency
16-18 Jamaica Boulevard
Federation Park,
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
Tel: 868 622-4261 | Fax: 868 622-2792
Email: postmaster@carpha.org
Website: www.carpha.org

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MEDIA RELEASE

Do the Right Thing. Get Vaccinated!

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. 22 April, 2019. Vaccines protect not only individuals but entire communities. If you are vaccinated, you are less likely to become infected or infect others and your loved ones. That is why it is important that our Region maintains its vaccination coverage of 95% or more, to ensure that children and other at-risk persons remain healthy," remarked Dr. Virginia Asin-Oostburg, Director of Surveillance Disease Prevention and Control at CARPHA.

Immunization is one of the most successful and cost-effective public health interventions. Safe and effective vaccines have been available for many years, and can prevent deaths from diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough) and measles. The most effective way to prevent these life-threatening diseases or severe outcomes from the illnesses is through vaccination.

The Caribbean has long been a leader among regions of the world, as our countries have applied high standards in the delivery of vaccination programs. While successfully maintaining a measles-free status since 1991, the Caribbean has also been eradicated of endemic smallpox in 1971, polio in 1994, and rubella and congenital rubella syndrome in 2015. The health of the general public improved drastically with the vaccinations that allowed children to survive because they no longer developed severe measles infections.

Dr. Asin-Oostburg said "Immunisation protects future generations and saves your family time and money. Diseases that used to be common in the Region can be prevented through routine childhood vaccines. We urge persons who have not immunised their children against vaccine preventable diseases for their age should do so immediately, or they will be at risk of contracting these diseases."

CARPHA continues to promote and support regional strategic vaccination planning in Member States. The Agency is equipped to investigate and manage communicable diseases. This includes vaccine preventable diseases, like polio, measles and rubella.

"As the sub regional reference laboratory for polio, we provide services to our Member States for the diagnosis of polio and common viral infections," said Dr Gabriel Gonzalez-Escobar, Head of Laboratory Services at CARPHA. He further stated that the Agency is actively working with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), offering services to four countries in Central America and the Spanish Caribbean which are Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

This year, Vaccination Week in the Americas is observed from April 20-27. The slogan "Protect your community. Do your part" is a strong call to action reminding us of the important role we play in supporting vaccination programmes and keeping deadly diseases at bay.

Ensuring the continued success of immunisation is a shared responsibility. CARPHA urges you to support vaccination programmes in your country. To maintain our community protection, we call on Ministries of Health to implement catch-up campaigns. This will ensure that a person completes their vaccination schedule in the shortest, but effective time frame. Continued vigilance is important. General practitioners should remain alert and take the appropriate actions in suspected cases of vaccine preventable diseases.

Vaccinations can save your life and that of your loved ones!

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