



Spotlight on Community-Driven Initiatives

Immunization in Yemen Amidst Adversity

Background

The prolonged humanitarian crisis in Yemen, characterized by devastated health systems and widespread displacement, has exacerbated the spread of diseases like cholera, diphtheria, and measles, jeopardizing the country's polio-free status and triggering outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2). In response, the Ministry of Public Health and Population, with EMPHNET's support, mobilized communities to aid the national immunization program. This initiative focuses on controlling the spread of communicable diseases, primarily polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs), by engaging communities in disease reporting and awareness raising.



Part of training over 600 polio village volunteers in both the northern and southern governorates of Yemen

Communities Engaged in Polio Village Volunteers Initiative

More specifically, in 2017, the **Polio Village Volunteers (PVV)** initiative was launched in Yemen. The initiative aims to involve communities' know-how in the area of acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) surveillance. With extensive training from EMPHNET, PVVs across the nation bolstered surveillance efforts. Building on this success, a 2023 collaboration further empowered PVVs to enhance surveillance of vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) and boost immunization coverage in hot zones in the country.

Communities Engaged in VPDs Surveillance

Despite challenges in Yemen's healthcare system due to disrupted facilities and insecurity, CBS is proving valuable in improving VPD surveillance, particularly in remote areas with high numbers of zero-dose children. Through CBS for VPDs, designated community members are trained to report suspected cases, supervised by district health office coordinators via WhatsApp groups. The PVV project engages communities in detecting and reporting AFP and VPDs, raising awareness about vaccination importance among caregivers. In 2023, numerous volunteers actively participated in these efforts, enhancing disease surveillance beyond traditional methods. See the facts below.

What is Community-Based Surveillance (CBS)?

CBS involves communities in detecting diseases with outbreak potential, complementing traditional surveillance. It's a cost-effective way to detect diseases in real-time and is crucial even in systems with effective surveillance, particularly in socioeconomically challenged areas.

Northern Governate



Where: Baida, Al-Dhalea, AL-Hodeidah, Al-Jawf, Al-Mahweet, Amran, Hajjah, Ibb, Marib, Rimahm Saadah, Sana'a, and Taiz



380+
Community Volunteers



1831+
Cases Reported



150
Suspected Whooping Cough Cases



47
Probable Diphtheria Cases



394
Suspected Measles Cases



2
Suspected Neonatal Tetanus Cases



32
Cholera Cases



7
AFP Cases



1199
Other cases

Southern Governate



Where: AL-Hodeidah, Aden, Abyan, Lahj, Marib, Taizz (Al Qahirah District), Taizz (Salah District), Taizz (AL-Makha District)



200
Community Volunteers



393
Total Cases



15
Death Cases



2
Probable Diphtheria Cases



371
Suspected Measles Cases



3
Suspected Neonatal Tetanus Cases



14
Other Cases



Second Quarter Review Meeting for Polio Village Volunteers in Ibb, Yemen (December, 2023)

Community members called for more awareness raising among communities to combat misconceptions and address hesitancy, possibly. This was achieved through the engagement of community influencers. In the southern governorate, an urgent call was made to improve immunization demand to improve the coverage and decrease morbidity and mortality from VPDs, especially measles.



Communities Raise Awareness Against Vaccine Hesitancy

Insights from PVVs highlight widespread misconceptions about vaccine safety. In response to these misconceptions, the Ministry and EMPHNET are strengthening the involvement of community influencers and religious leaders. This involvement is set to boost immunization demand through awareness raising. At this point and with the help of PVVs, awareness meetings are being conducted with potential informants: community influencers, including religious leaders, traditional midwives, schoolteachers, and traditional healers. The purpose is to enhance the community's understanding of the vaccination's significance in preventing diseases and to increase public acceptance and demand for immunization. Check out the facts and figures below.



45

Awareness Meetings
30 in the northern governorate
15 in the southern governorate



600

Community influencers, religious leaders, community health workers, and volunteers



Northern Governorate
Al-Hodeida Directorate



300

Community influencers, religious leaders, community health workers, and volunteers



Southern Governorate
AL-Burikah, Dar Saad, Toban District, AL-Madharebah, Moudiah, Lawdar, Khanfar, AL-Modfer, AL-Qahirah, Salah, (Makhah, AL-Khokha, Hayas, AL-Madina, AL-Wadi)

GHDJEMPHNET: Working Together for Better Health

The Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) is a regional network that focuses on strengthening public health systems in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) and beyond. EMPHNET works in partnership with ministries of health, non-government organizations, international agencies, private sector, and relevant institutions from the region and the globe to promote public health and applied epidemiology. To advance the work of EMPHNET, Global Health Development (GHD) was initiated to build coordination mechanisms with partners and collaborators. Together, GHDJEMPHNET is dedicated to serving the region by supporting efforts to promote public health policies, strategic planning, sustainable financing, resource mobilization, public health programs, and other related areas.