



ALAS Foundation's Wyclef Jean Joins PAHO to Boost Immunization in Haiti

New public service announcement promotes vaccination against rubella and measles.

Washington, D.C., April XX, 2008 (PAHO) — Haitian musician, producer and writer Wyclef Jean, a founding member of the ALAS Foundation, today launched a new public service announcement (PSA) aimed at boosting participation in a campaign to vaccinate young Haitians against measles and rubella. With a target population of more than 4 million youths, it is one of the largest immunization efforts ever undertaken in Haiti.

In the PSA, produced by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in association with the ALAS Foundation, Jean urges Haitian parents to take their children and adolescents to get vaccinated as “an act of love.” The PSA promotes the campaign’s second phase, starting April 14, which targets young people ages 1 to 19 in urban areas. The first phase, launched last November, targeted young people in rural communities.

With the Creole slogan of *Ann Al Vaksinen* (“Get Vaccinated”), Haitian health workers in the first phase of the campaign delivered vaccines to an estimated 2.3 million young people in rural areas and some urban schools. Children aged 1 to 4 received vitamin A supplements, and school-aged children were also given antiparasitics. In the second phase, health officials hope to reach an additional 1.8 million youths.

The immunization campaign is aimed at advancing toward elimination of rubella and congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) in Haiti and consolidating the country’s elimination of measles. The effort is expected to prevent more than 1,200 CRS cases over the next decade and is part of a larger effort by the countries of the Americas to eliminate both rubella and CRS regionwide by 2010.

Rubella, caused by a virus, is normally a mild childhood disease, but if a woman is infected early in pregnancy, her baby can be born with CRS, resulting in birth defects that can include blindness, deafness, heart defects and mental retardation. Before countries began to vaccinate against rubella, more than 20,000 children were born with CRS in the Americas alone. Today, more than 145 million men, women, and children in the region have been vaccinated against the disease.

“Rubella is on its way to becoming the third disease to be eradicated from the globe,” said Cuauhtémoc Ruiz, head of PAHO’s immunization program. “This effort in Haiti is important not only for reducing cases in one country, but for progress toward regional elimination.”



“This is a totally preventable disease that no one in Haiti or anywhere else should have to suffer from,” said Wyclef. “This campaign is making it possible for parents to protect their children from the terrible effects of this disease.”

The Haitian campaign is being supported by the Government of Haiti, PAHO, the Canadian Public Health Agency, the European Union, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Foundation, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the ALAS Foundation.

Haiti has the worst health indicators of any country in the Americas, including the highest rates of infant mortality and lowest rates of childhood immunization. The measles and rubella campaign is an effort to change that situation.

“This campaign is something ALAS members all care deeply about,” said an ALAS officer. “We are happy that, through the commitment of governments, the private sector, NGOs and families throughout Haiti, we will be able to save the lives of thousands of boys and girls who otherwise die each year from preventable diseases.”

The ALAS Foundation is a nonprofit organization founded by prominent artists, entrepreneurs and intellectuals to mobilize Latin American society towards the implementation of integrated early childhood development public policies, so that every child from zero to six years old has access health plans, education and nutrition.

www.alasthemovement.org

Yéle Haiti is a foundation started by Grammy-Award winning musician Wyclef Jean that is changing thousands of lives in Haiti by supporting projects in education, health, environment and community development.

www.yele.org/

PAHO, founded in 1902, works with all the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of their peoples. It also serves as the Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization.

www.paho.org

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