

2003

## Vaccine Week in the Americas: A Gesture of Love

---

**More than 200,000 health workers traveled to remote villages, border zones and marginal urban areas to vaccinate children during the first-ever Vaccination Week in the Americas, June 1 through 8. Preliminary reports indicate that the campaign was a success, and plans are already under way for a hemisphere-wide effort next year.**

Nineteen countries from South and Central America and the Caribbean participated in the campaign, which focused especially on children who had never been vaccinated or who needed to complete their vaccine series. A major objective was to consolidate the interruption of measles (which has not circulated in the region for more than six months) as well as to maintain polio eradication and protect children from other vaccine-preventable diseases.



*Children on the Peru side of the Peruvian-Ecuadorian border wear special stickers after getting their shots.*



*Health workers travel by boat to vaccinate children in remote towns and villages in the border area of Bolivia, Peru and Brazil.*

In the towns of Bolpebra, Iñaparí and Asís, on the borders of Bolivia, Peru and Brazil, health officials and residents braved 115-degree weather to launch the campaign, seeing campaign workers off as they departed on canoes for towns accessible only by boat. Among the participating dignitaries were Minister of Health of Bolivia Javier Torres Gotilla, Vice-Minister of Health of Peru Carlos Rodríguez and representatives of Brazil's Ministry of Health.

In the town of Cucuta, on the border between Venezuela and Colombia, Minister of Social Protection of Colombia Diego Palacio Betancourt and the governor of the department of Santander participated in the launch along with health officials from Venezuela's state of Tachira.



*First lady Eliane Karp de Toledo of Peru (right) watches as first lady of Ecuador Ximena Bohórquez (second from right) administers oral polio vaccine to a child in Huaquillas, Ecuador, near the Peruvian border. Bohórquez is a physician.*

On the Ecuador-Peru border, first ladies Ximena Bohórquez and Eliane Karp de Toledo joined their countries' ministers of health to launch the campaign in the towns of Huaquillas and Aguas Verdes.

Campaign workers also carried out activities on the borders of Argentina and Bolivia, Chile and Bolivia, and Paraguay and Argentina, among others. In all, the campaign reached 10 border areas, demonstrating the importance of cross-border cooperation in fighting disease and health inequities.

Since its proposal earlier this year as a South American initiative, Vaccination Week in the Americas grew to include Central America, Mexico, Bahamas and Jamaica. The goal for next year's campaign is to include all the countries of the Americas, including Canada and the United States.

## **Bolivia-Peru-Brazil: Joining forces across borders**

---

*By José Antonio Pages*  
PAHO/WHO Representative in Bolivia



*Bolivia's minister of health, Javier Torres Goitia, briefs reporters in Bolpebra at the launching of **Vaccination Week in the Americas** on June 1. Torres Goitia's visit was the first by a minister of state in the town's history.*

In the space of two hours, we came to know three areas in three sister countries that share a common history. Bolpebra, with some 1,300 inhabitants, lies at the northwestern tip of Bolivia, where two rivers unite—not divide—Bolivia, Peru and Brazil. Where the three countries meet, their inhabitants also come together for recreation and conversation, to enjoy each other's company and share each other's dreams.

One of these dreams came true during the first week of June, when for the first time in history, Bolpebra played host to a minister of state along with delegations of government officials, members of political parties, health workers, and representatives of international cooperation agencies. They traveled here for the launching of the first-ever Vaccination Week in the Americas, an opportunity to reach out to those who have largely been left out

of the development process.

Minister of Health of Bolivia Javier Torres Goitia was officially welcomed by a local army unit consisting of four lean but muscular soldiers who could have been no more than 15 years old. It was an emotional moment for both visitors and residents, one that reaffirmed our collective will to join forces to overcome poverty and advance firmly toward development.

The launching of Vaccination Week in the Americas demonstrated the importance of health actions as a bridge between peoples to build understanding, cooperation and hopes for a better future.



*Health workers gather at the border crossing at Jaen, Peru, on the Peru-Ecuador border.*



*Schoolchildren parade to celebrate Vaccination Week in the Americas at the border crossing between Ecuador and Peru.*

Women, children, young people and adults all welcomed visitors from distant places, sharing smiles and embraces and showing a profound desire to improve their living conditions and their families' health. Parents with babies in their arms lined up alongside young women of childbearing age to get vaccinations that will protect themselves from disease.

The mayors of Asís, Brazil; Bolpebra, Bolivia; and Iñaparí, Peru are all young men with the kind of leadership qualities that our poorest communities so badly need. They are well loved by their communities and get along well among themselves. Asís provides a bit of clean water to Bolpebra; Iñaparí sells electricity to its Bolivian neighbors during certain hours of the day. On six national and

local holidays each year, residents from all three towns gather together as if they were one big family speaking the same language with only slightly different accents. These are moments when three peoples are united in the desire for a better life and in efforts to convert their hopes into reality.

## **El Salvador**

---

El Salvador's minister of health, José Francisco López Beltrán, was on hand for the national launching of Vaccination Week in the Americas, on June 1 in San Martín, in the department of San Salvador. Ana Elean Chévez, national coordinator of El Salvador's Expanded Immunization Program, noted that campaign workers would go door to door and work from mobile vaccine posts. "Vaccines will be available seven days a week in health posts or through health promoters," she explained.

El Salvador's campaign would concentrate on 129 municipalities in areas with poorer vaccination coverage.



*Children gather in San Martín, in El Salvador's department of San Salvador, for the launching of Vaccination Week in the Americas.*



*A health worker vaccinates a school-age child. The regional campaign made special efforts to reach children who had never been vaccinated and those whose vaccine series were incomplete.*



*Mothers wait to get their babies vaccinated in San Martín, San Salvador.*



*San Martín Mayor Valentín Castro speaks at the launching of Vaccination Week in El Salvador. Listening are (from right) PAHO/WHO Representative Horacio Toro and Minister of Health of El Salvador José López Beltrán.*



*Minister of Health of El Salvador José López Beltrán administers an oral polio vaccine to an infant in San Martín, El Salvador.*



*An infant is vaccinated during the launching of Vaccination Week in the Americas in El Salvador.*

## **Guatemala**

---

Guatemala's official launching of Vaccination Week in the Americas took place in the village of Chupol, in the municipality of Chichicastenango, department of Quiché. Presiding over the ceremony were Coralia Cajas, director of the National Immunization Program; community leader Juan Garcas and PAHO/WHO Representative Pedro Luis Castellanos. "I've come to invite you to vaccinate your children," said Garcas. "I've seen how some parents refuse to do this because they say their children can die from fever, but that's just ignorance. Vaccines are health, and I, as a community leader and guardian of my family, am going to make sure that, among the 20 families in my care, not a single boy or girl will go without a vaccine."



*Juan Garcas, community leader*



*Quiché girls hold Vaccination Week balloons during Guatemala's official launching of the campaign in the municipality of Chichicastenango.*

*of the village of Agua Escondida in Guatemala.*

## **Other countries**

**Argentina's** campaign targeted children 1 to 6 years old, vaccinating some 300,000 in all through door-to-door visits, in health centers and at temporary vaccination posts.

In **Chile**, the target was children aged 2 months to 5 years who had never been vaccinated. The campaign focused on six health service areas of the capital, which account for more than half of the country's infant population, and on two border areas: Arica, on the border with Peru and Bolivia, and Llanquihue, on Chile's border with Argentina.

**Suriname's** campaign focused on children aged 3 months to 5 years in the Upper Suriname River area, largely populated by the tribal Maroon peoples.

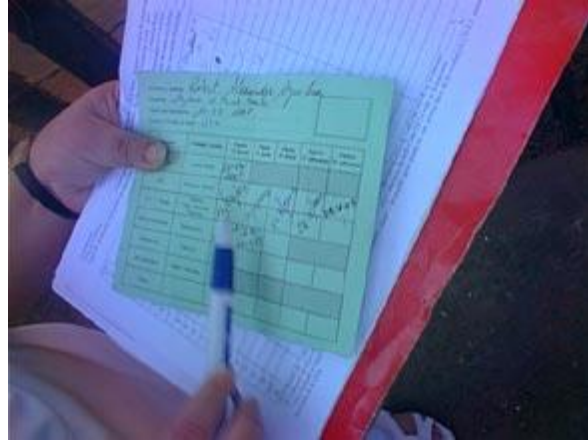
**Uruguay** made a special effort to reach children in marginal areas of the departments of Montevideo, San José and Canelones. The goal was to achieve 95 percent vaccination coverage in those regions.



*Mothers line up with their children in the Petare district of Caracas, **Venezuela**, on the first day of Vaccination Week in the Americas. Minister of Health María Urbaneja was on hand for the campaign's launching in the Catia neighborhood of the country's capital.*



Health workers in Asunción, **Paraguay**, compare notes on neighborhoods with historically low vaccination coverage.



In Asunción, **Paraguay**, a vaccine worker checks a child's vaccination record. The nationwide goal was to vaccinate 95 percent of children aged 1 to 4.

[Close This Window](#)