



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

# Message from the Minister of Health Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton, MP Vaccination Week of the Americas April 20–May 3, 2019



Jamaica joins more than 40 countries and territories in the celebration of Vaccination Week in the Americas 2019, under the theme **'Protect Your Community. Do Your Part. #GetVax'**.

This theme serves as an important call to action for our people to get vaccinated, not only in their individual interest, but also the collective interest of the communities of which they are a part.

It has been well established that vaccination is one of the most successful and cost-effective health interventions. Each year, two million lives are saved globally due to vaccination, which helps your body to develop immunity to serious infections and prepares it to produce a stronger and faster immune response to invading germs.

It is against this background that the Expanded Programme on Immunization was established in Jamaica and the English-speaking Caribbean in 1977, with the aim to prevent morbidity and mortality from specific vaccine-preventable diseases.

It is also why Jamaica, like many other countries, has laws supporting immunization. Our Immunization Regulation of 1986 (amended in 2013) mandates that all children under the age of seven years must be adequately immunized before entry to school, including nurseries and day care centres.

Our national immunization programme is a high priority for the Government. Since 2017, the Ministry of Health has spent approximately J\$100 million per year on vaccination supplies for our population. Our healthcare teams also work hard to achieve the national target of at least 95% vaccination coverage for our infants and young children, who are the most vulnerable among us.

Routine vaccination of our children through national immunization programmes has been very effective in protecting them against serious vaccine-preventable diseases that are now very rare, like tetanus ('lock jaw'), measles, rubella, and polio.

The national immunization schedule was designed to have all infants and young children comprehensively immunized against 10 targeted diseases: Tuberculosis (TB); Diphtheria; Pertussis

("whooping cough"); Tetanus; Poliomyelitis (polio); Measles; Mumps; Rubella; Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib); and Hepatitis B. All immunizations offered under the national immunization schedule are given free of cost.

In October 2017, given the prevalence of cervical cancer, the Ministry of Health introduced the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine to girls entering grade seven to protect our next generation against cervical cancer. Giving the HPV vaccine to our girls now will help to protect them from this deadly cancer later in life.

In 2018, Jamaica achieved more than 90% vaccination coverage for most diseases: 98% for polio and Hib, 97% for DPT (diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus) and Hepatitis B, and 93% for BCG (that protects against tuberculosis).

Of concern, however, is that vaccination coverage for Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) was last year less than 90%, with 89% and 82% respectively for the first and second doses of the MMR vaccine.

Measles infections kill more children than any other vaccine-preventable disease. Vaccination is the only way to prevent the spread of measles. Two (2) doses of the MMR vaccine are needed to provide full protection.

Currently, several countries in the Region of the Americas are facing measles outbreaks, even though the region was declared free of the disease in 2016. The Ministry has been monitoring the increase in reported cases in countries where outbreaks have been declared and is on the alert for imported cases in Jamaica. The risk of importation is particularly high for the island, given the influx of visitors from overseas.

The Ministry of Health, therefore, asks for the public's full cooperation with our local health authorities to ensure timely notification of suspected measles cases and to support adequate vaccination for your communities.

We all must play our part to safeguard the gains of the national immunization programme to protect the population against vaccine-preventable diseases.

Thank you.

## 17TH VACCINATION WEEK In the AMERICAS

Protect your Community.  
Do Your Part. #Getvax



### PARISH CELEBRATIONS

Contact your local health department for the schedule of events

### NATIONAL CHURCH SERVICE

Sunday, April 28, 2019

Spanish Town New Testament Church of God  
Ellerslie Pen, Spanish Town, Beside  
Food for the Poor  
9:30a.m.

### NATIONAL IMMUNIZATION FAIR

Tuesday, April 30, 2019

Prison Oval, Spanish Town, St. Catherine  
9a.m. to 5p.m. Admission FREE

Free immunizations all day  
Free health checks  
On-site processing of applications for birth certificates and other services by the Registrar General Department Booths, giveaways, and much more