

Vaccinate to protect everyone!

WCO-Angola

In our constant quest to promote a healthy lifestyle, we still face the challenge of protecting ourselves against pathogens that challenge our immune system. In this context, vaccines emerge as a powerful ally, strengthening our natural defense and reducing disease risk. Exploring the essential role of vaccines in maintaining an entire and healthy life is crucial to understanding how to guarantee energy and vitality in the face of everyday challenges.

In the 18th century, the English physician Edward Jenner carried out a pioneering experiment that led to the creation of the first vaccine. Observing that people who milked cows and contracted the animal disease became immune to human smallpox, Jenner conducted a study with the virus of a disease acquired from cows, which had similar symptoms to smallpox. This innovative process of using the same medication on individuals with similar symptoms was officially called 'vaccination' in reference to its bovine origin.

According to the World Health Organization, a vaccine is a preparation designed to generate immunity against a disease by stimulating the production of antibodies. Vaccines are the most effective way of preventing illness, disability and death.

When we receive a vaccine, our body undergoes a complex and crucial process to strengthen immunity. The process of inoculating the virus or bacterium - attenuated, dead, or just small parts of it - into our body demands a specific response from our immune system to fight it. In doing so, our system generates short- or long-term memory - antibodies. So, if we are exposed to the same disease again, our immune system will already be able to fight it because it has a known structure. The reactions we experience when vaccinating, such as fever or feeling unwell, are a sign of this incredible internal work in the immune system.

Today, thanks to technological advances, the production of vaccines is increasingly sophisticated and safe, and they are already capable of preventing more than 20 types of disease, which is why they are called vaccine preventable.

In this way, vaccination prevents the contraction of diseases that can be transmitted directly through physical contact with a person or animal infected with a disease, without the interference of an intermediary object, and indirectly, through the transfer of the microorganism (virus or bacteria causing the disease) via objects contaminated by a sick person (food, water and contaminated objects) and transmitted by vectors (flies, ticks, mosquitoes, rats, bats and others). Depending on the type of virus or bacterium, they can have a high-speed reproduction system, which means that a single sick person can contaminate many others around them for directly transmitted diseases.



The power of the vaccine

Fortunately, by getting vaccinated, you protect yourself and those around you. When 95 per cent of the population is vaccinated, there is a reduction in the number of infectious agents circulating, enabling collective protection in communities. The yellow fever epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic have shown how dangerous a virus can be for the population. It is the responsibility of each of us to get vaccinated, to vaccinate our loved ones and to ensure that periods like these, which we have recently experienced, become a memory of the past.

The Angolan Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization (WHO) and partners have been working hard to ensure that vaccines reach the population free of charge and are available to the most significant number of people throughout the country, as is the case with the polio vaccine. For this reason, after an outbreak of circulating type 2 vaccine-derived poliovirus (VDPV2) was confirmed on 27 February 2024, in response, Angola carried out four mass vaccination campaigns across the country, two at the national level and two at the sub-national level. As a result of this commendable effort by the government and its partners, around 17 million doses of the nOPV2 vaccine were administered to children under five years of age.

It should be noted that Angola has made significant progress in the fight against polio and was declared free of the wild poliovirus in 2011. However, due to low vaccination coverage, it has faced sporadic outbreaks of polio, reaffirming the importance of all of us together strengthening surveillance, improving vaccination coverage, addressing vaccine hesitancy, implementing innovative strategies and revitalizing sustained political and financial commitment to ensure that all children are vaccinated and protected from the lifelong paralysis and disability caused by polio. The examples are clear - vaccination already saves millions of lives yearly and is widely recognized as one of the most successful interventions for protecting people's health. That's why we all have a responsibility to protect ourselves and our families from vaccine-preventable diseases by taking three crucial steps:

- a) get vaccinated and ensure that your children receive routine vaccinations;
- b) make your family, friends and neighbors aware of the importance of vaccination; and
- c) pay attention to the dates of the vaccination campaigns announced by the government and welcome the vaccination team. Only together can we create a future free of vaccine-preventable diseases and protect everyone around us. Stay informed through reliable sources. Visit the Ministry of Health website: www.vacina.gov.ao or the WHO website <https://www.afro.who.int/pt/countries/angola>.

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