

Sierra Leone Leads Regional Push to Close Immunization Gaps During African Vaccination Week 2025

"Immunisation for All is Humanly Possible."

Freetown, 2 May 2025 – The Government of Sierra Leone, in collaboration with the African Union Commission (AUC), Gavi – the Vaccine Alliance, Africa CDC, World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, and a broad coalition of health partners, commemorated African Vaccination Week (AVW) 2025 under the compelling theme: *"Immunisation for All is Humanly Possible."*

Sierra Leone, which continues to demonstrate strong leadership in public health, has achieved over 90% coverage with the third dose of the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine (DTP3), a benchmark for immunization system performance.

From **24 April - 02 May 2025**, Sierra Leone joined other African countries in marking the 15th edition of AVW, an initiative led by WHO to promote vaccination as a basic human right and an essential tool to prevent disease and save lives. The campaign culminated in a High-Level Event in Freetown hosted by Vice President Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh and Health Minister Dr. Austin Demby, alongside senior officials from the AUC, WHO, UNICEF, and Gavi.

Across Africa, **millions of children remain unvaccinated**, largely due to systemic inequities and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, the **'Big Catch-Up' initiative** has vaccinated over 5 million previously unreached African children since its launch in 2023, with DTP3 coverage in the region increasing from 72% to 74%.

Speaking at the event, **Professor Julio Rakotonirina**, Director for Health and Humanitarian Affairs at the African Union Commission, underscored the significance of collective action:

"This year's Africa Vaccination Week reminds us that saving lives through immunization is not only possible — it is our responsibility. A self-reliant Africa where every country has the capacity to produce, deliver, and equitably distribute vaccines is not only humanly possible — it is non-negotiable."

He reiterated the African Union's commitment to the **Addis Declaration on Immunization, Agenda 2063**, and **CARMMA Plus (2021–2030)**- continental frameworks that position immunization at the heart of health equity, resilience, and sustainable development.

"Immunization is a key investment in human capital and poverty reduction," he added. "As we work together with partners and governments, our mission is clear: reach the zero-dose child, close the immunization gap, and build resilient health systems that leave no one behind."

Minister of Health, **Dr. Austin Demby**, emphasized Sierra Leone's progress and ambition:

"Immunisation is a cornerstone of our public health system. We are committed to ensuring that no child in Sierra Leone is left behind. Together, we can protect every life, because immunisation for all is humanly possible."

UNICEF Representative **Rudolf Schwenk** stated:

"Vaccines are one of the most effective ways to give every child a fair chance at a healthy future. UNICEF is proud to work with the Government of Sierra Leone and partners to ensure no child is left behind."

Gavi CEO **Dr. Sania Nishtar** applauded Sierra Leone's leadership:

"Sierra Leone has maintained progress on routine immunization even while introducing new vaccines and responding to disease outbreaks. Gavi is committed to this partnership, helping to protect more children and support the country's sustainable development."

With over **US\$200 million in Gavi support since 2001**, Sierra Leone has expanded its routine immunization program to include vaccines against **rotavirus, pneumococcal disease, HPV, polio, measles, rubella, yellow fever, cholera, and malaria**. The country has also launched successful preventive Ebola and mpox vaccination campaigns.

WHO Representative **Dr. George Ameh** reaffirmed:

"This African Vaccination Week, we reaffirm our commitment to working alongside the Government and partners to ensure that every person in Sierra Leone, regardless of where they live, has access to these life-saving interventions."

During African Vaccination Week, Sierra Leone:

- Conducted outreach campaigns and mobile vaccination drives to reach underserved areas and hard-to-reach populations.
- Supported catch-up vaccination initiatives to ensure children and adolescents receive missed doses.
- Engaged parents, caregivers, traditional leaders, and health workers through public education and community mobilization to strengthen vaccine awareness.
- Promoted vaccine confidence and tackled misinformation to ensure informed decision-making across communities.

With continued partner support, Sierra Leone is investing in cold chain infrastructure, health worker training, and solarization of health facilities, strengthening its capacity to deliver vaccines and improve health outcomes nationwide.

Together, we will ensure that every person in Africa, no matter where they live- has access to the vaccines they need to survive and thrive. Immunisation for all is not just a goal; it is Humanly Possible.

About the African Union

The African Union (AU) is a continental body consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of the African Continent. It was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, 1963-1999).

The AU is guided by its vision of ***"An Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena."***

<https://au.int/en>

About the Ministry of Health, Sierra Leone

The Ministry of Health (MOH) of Sierra Leone is the government body responsible for overseeing public health and medical services nationwide. Guided by its vision of achieving universal health coverage, the MOH is committed to ensuring equitable access to quality

healthcare for all citizens. The ministry develops and implements health policies, coordinates responses to public health challenges, and prioritizes disease prevention and health system strengthening. In collaboration with international partners, NGOs, and local communities, the MOH works to improve health outcomes, particularly in maternal and child health, infectious disease control, and health infrastructure development.

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

For more information about UNICEF and its work for children in Sierra Leone, visit <https://www.unicef.org/sierraleone>

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GAVI: Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance is a public-private partnership that helps vaccinate more than half the world's children against some of the world's deadliest diseases. The Vaccine Alliance brings together developing country and donor governments, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank, the vaccine industry, technical agencies, civil society, the Gates Foundation and other private sector partners. View the full list of donor governments and other leading organisations that fund [Gavi's work here](#). Learn more at www.gavi.org and connect with us on [Facebook](#) and [X \(Twitter\)](#). View the full list of donor governments and other leading organisations that fund [Gavi's work here](#).

WHO: The World Health Organization (WHO), established in 1948, is the United Nations specialized agency for public health. Operating in over 150 countries, WHO works with governments and partners to coordinate international health efforts, set standards, provide technical support, and promote health and well-being for all.

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