

7. Can vaccines help to eradicate or eliminate certain diseases?

Key Messages

- Vaccines have brought seven major human diseases under some degree of control - smallpox, diphtheria, tetanus, yellow fever, whooping cough, polio, and measles.
- Eradication of diseases would be ideal but is challenging: eradication requires high levels of population immunity in all regions of the world over a prolonged period, complemented by adequate surveillance.
- So far only one disease, smallpox, has been eradicated by vaccines, and this saves millions of lives and substantial resources each year.
- For diseases with an environmental reservoir, such as tetanus, or with animal reservoirs, such as rabies, eradication may not be possible.

Corresponding FAQs

- *# 2: I haven't seen these diseases you are talking about. Why should I vaccinate my child against something that doesn't affect people here?*
- *# 3: Now that most of the old diseases are under control, don't I put my child at unnecessary risk by vaccinating him/her?*
- *# 30: Why does my child need to keep being immunized against polio?*
- *# 31: What is this new injectable polio vaccine, and why does my child need both the new and the old one?*

Characters

Elder	John
Caregiver	Anna
Caregiver	David
FLW	Marie

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Narrator: Welcome to Audio Job Aid number seven! This Audio Job Aid is a little different from the others because it takes place in a community meeting so you will hear a frontline worker, Marie, who is working with a respected community elder named John to promote vaccination. You will also hear a few voices of community members who are expressing their concerns and questions. While you are listening, think about a respected person from your community who might be able to support you in your work of encouraging all caregivers to bring their children for immunization. Let's listen in...

Marie: Hello, everyone! Welcome. It's great to see the whole community gathered together!

I called for this community meeting to discuss an issue that has been coming up in some of my home visits and discussions with caregivers. Many of you understand why it's important to immunize your children to protect them from diseases, but I understand some of you have questions about the bigger picture of immunization. Please feel free to ask me anything you want to know.

David: Will we have to keep immunizing our children forever?

(mumbles from the crowd)

Anna: If immunizations are so effective, why haven't they eliminated the diseases they prevent?

(mumbles from the crowd)

Marie: Thank you, all, for sharing your concerns with me. To help you understand the bigger picture related to immunization, I have called a very important person here to help me explain. Please welcome, John!

(clapping)

John: Thank you, all, and thank you, Marie, for inviting me here today. I am not a health worker, but I like to talk about immunizations because all that I have seen in my long life has helped me realize how important immunization is ... You see, when I was young, four of my siblings and many of my cousins and friends died when they were young children. Many of them died from smallpox, polio, measles and other such diseases, and many more of them got very ill from these diseases and nearly died. But over the years, vaccines have been developed to prevent these diseases, and gradually the number of children falling ill and dying from these vaccine-preventable diseases has dropped off. For this reason, I get to enjoy being a grandfather to many happy, healthy and strong grandchildren, and I don't have to worry about their fate since I have gone with their parents to the health centers to see that they get immunized. But I can't be the only one doing this. It is up to all of us to make sure all our children are fully immunized – this is the only way that we can get rid of the diseases that were previously so common among children. We all need to do our part to keep our children, our communities and our world healthy.

(clapping, cheering)

Marie: Wow, thank you so much, John, for that stirring testimony! And it's true, it is possible to get rid of, or eradicate, diseases through immunization – we have done it with smallpox and this saves millions of lives every year.

Anna: What about polio – can we eradicate that too?

Marie: While we may not have polio in our country any more, some countries are still struggling with polio cases, and outbreaks. So we must continue immunizing our children against polio until it is gone from the entire world. As long as a single child remains infected with the polio virus somewhere in the world, children in all countries are at risk of contracting the disease and so have to be protected.

David: Well, if we vaccinate our children here, but people in another community or another country don't vaccinate their children, how will we ever get rid of the diseases?

Marie: Good question, the best you can do is to make sure your children complete their immunization schedule and to remind friends and family to do the same with their children. At the national level, our strategy is to achieve high levels of routine

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immunization, and then keep up these high levels of immunization coverage. At a national level, there are always teams of people who closely monitor any outbreaks so they can immediately take action to stop the outbreak. We will have to continue with this strategy until a disease is eradicated globally... John, why don't you tell the parents what we were talking about yesterday?

John: Sure! One thing Marie reminded me about is that it is also important to remember that some of the germs that cause some diseases exist outside of people. For example, tetanus germs can be in the soil and rabies germs in various animals. Marie explained that it may not be possible to eliminate these diseases from the world since we cannot eliminate the source. But we can certainly protect our children and ourselves from these diseases through immunization.

Marie: Thank you, John, that's right. Overall, the key thing to remember is that there are diseases we can actually eliminate from our community if we all take the action of immunizing our children!

John: Yes, think of all the lives that would be saved each year, just like what has been done by the eradication of smallpox and the control of other diseases that killed too many in my generation. We can do it, together!

(clapping, cheering)

Marie: It will take time, but we must remain persistent! Don't forget that we have immunization days every week at the health center so you can bring your children to do your part!

(clapping and various voices saying affirmative statements like "yeah, we will.")

Narrator: What a positive ending to this community meeting! Talking to caregivers about vaccines and topics like eradication of diseases can be difficult because scientific information can be difficult for many people to understand. This is why personal testimony can be very effective – it not only is trustworthy because it comes from a respected person, but it makes the information easy to understand because it is explained through personal experience. I hope this Audio Job Aid has given you some ideas about how to address complicated questions that come up in your work.