

TAG 15 Meeting – Beijing, China, June 2005

The Technical Advisory Group on the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) and Poliomyelitis Eradication in the Western Pacific Region (TAG) provides technical advice to guide immunisation programmes in the region (including Pacific Island countries and territories). At the 15th TAG meeting (Beijing, 8–10 June 2005), deliberations were undertaken with representatives of member states and international partner agencies. The agenda covered several issues, with a focus on measles elimination and hepatitis B control — the two new pillars adopted by the 2003 Regional Committee Meeting to strengthen EPI.

The meeting concluded that regional measles elimination by 2012 is feasible, but it will be challenging in some countries requiring extra efforts. To maintain the partnering of the twin pillars, TAG also recommended a 2012 milestone for reducing HBsAg prevalence to less than 2% for five-year-olds (towards achieving the regional goal of less than 1%). TAG recommended that the regional director ask the September 2005 Regional Committee Meeting to adopt these goals.

The meeting emphasised the importance of safeguarding the investment made in achieving poliomyelitis-free status and the need for each country to maintain high-quality AFP surveillance and high oral poliovirus vaccine (OPV) coverage levels until certification of the global eradication of poliomyelitis.

TAG noted that strong national immunisation services capable of reaching all children, irrespective of their geographical location and socio-economic status, will be the key to achievement of all these goals, as well as future goals the region may set with respect to new vaccines. The Global Immunization Vision and Strategies (GIVS), endorsed by the 2005 World Health Assembly, provides a useful framework for strengthening national immunisation services. A comprehensive and costed multi-year plan provides a practical way for each country to implement GIVS in a locally appropriate way.

The regional Interagency Coordinating Committee (ICC), which held its meeting along with TAG, recommended establishment of an Asia-Pacific immunisation partnership. This partnership would enable mobilisation and coordination of support for further improvement of immunisation services, including regional measles elimination, hepatitis B control, maintaining poliomyelitis-free status and strengthening routine immunisation services.

Further information about the meeting can be obtained from Richard Duncan, EPI Technical Officer, Suva, Fiji (duncanr@sp.wpro.who.int).