

# Vietnam

## Fighting disease through vaccination

Vietnam is a showcase of what an effective immunisation programme can achieve.

The national EPI programme commenced in 1985, with administration of six traditional vaccines for children under the age of one. In 1991, provision of tetanus vaccine started for pregnant women.

With support from development partners and donors including the GAVI Alliance, the country has used vaccines effectively to control vaccine-preventable diseases, eradicating polio in 2000 and eliminating newborn tetanus in 2005. Vietnam's current multi-year plan for immunisation targets the elimination of measles and reduction of diphtheria and pertussis.

Far fewer children are dying or becoming ill from vaccine-preventable diseases. The infant mortality rate dropped by two-thirds between 1993 and 2004 and under-five mortality by more than 40% since 1990.

## A dynamic institutional and policy setting

Immunisation is taking place amid far-reaching and challenging institutional and policy reform. Recent high rates of economic growth have raised Vietnam's living standards. This brings new opportunities, but the health sector faces stiff competition for public resources and, as a result, constraints in funding.

The health system is similarly in transition from a wholly state-financed, centrally-run system to a more decentralised system that includes private financing. Vietnam has a highly developed social infrastructure, which has kept immunisation coverage consistently above 90% since 2003. Yet the impact of reform has drawn attention to, and increased the risk of, shortages of trained health workers and inequalities in service delivery between provinces. There is therefore a need for renewed focus on reaching the hard-to-reach.

## How GAVI helps

The GAVI Alliance provides critical financial support to immunise Vietnam's children and to strengthen the country's health system to deliver services. By mid-2009, Vietnam had received US\$ 30.7 million from GAVI:

- **US\$ 14.4 million** for vaccines
- **US\$ 12.1 million** for strengthening the health system, notably through training health workers
- **US\$ 3.2 million** for injection safety
- **US\$ 1 million** to immunisation services

In 2002, GAVI supported the introduction of hepatitis B vaccination, which now reaches 83% of the target population. In the 46 provinces that use the GAVI-sponsored vaccine, the country has achieved high levels of coverage.

GAVI has also contributed to major advances in injection safety practices in Vietnam.



*A mother and her daughter waiting for vaccinations at the Son Lôi commune health clinic in Vinh Phuc Province. The monthly immunisation sessions attract a big crowd and coverage rates look set to reach 95% in 2009.*

A trainer demonstrates the contents of a special health bag to village health workers in Ha Giang. More than 2,000 of the health bags have been distributed to village health workers.



Cash grants from GAVI from 2002 to 2006 enabled the country to buy auto-disable syringes from a local manufacturer. Since 2006, Vietnam has continued to procure these syringes, adding to sustainability.

In 2007, GAVI committed to fund a four-year, US\$ 16.3 million health system strengthening programme to increase the number of village health workers, strengthen the capacity of commune health centres, and reinforce management, supervision, and monitoring at all levels. The programme seeks to improve delivery of basic health services targeting the country's ten most disadvantaged provinces, reaching a population of 10 million. Of the total GAVI grant, US\$ 13.6 million is earmarked for human resource development, focusing on integrated training and skill upgrade to reach the hard to reach.

### **Advancing new vaccines**

Building on the achievements of the previous five years, Vietnam's 2006-2010 health care strategy targets eliminating measles and expanding coverage of Japanese encephalitis (JE) vaccine. The plan provides for adding a second

dose of measles vaccine to routine vaccinations to reach at least 95% of children in all districts. Vaccination against JE, which achieved about 50% coverage by 2005, is planned reach all eligible populations in 2010.

Vietnam most recently applied for US\$ 21.3 million in financial support from GAVI to introduce pentavalent vaccine which includes *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib). Hib is estimated to cause nearly 2% of deaths among children under five years old.

The pentavalent vaccine replaces separate vaccines for DTP, hepatitis B and Hib, reducing the number of injections children need to receive. At the same time, Vietnam has completed clinical trials of a vaccine against rotavirus, the most common cause of severe diarrhoea in young children.

With the support of the GAVI Alliance, Vietnam is making considerable improvements in the health of its population and providing valuable, life-saving protection for future generations.

Information current as of October 2009