

VACCINATION IS PROTECTION





CELEBRATE LIFE!

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Celebrate Life! Vaccination is Protection

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FOREWORD



Nearly 36 million children are born every year in the WHO South-East Asia Region, accounting for one quarter of all births globally. Every newborn and child, wherever they live, and to whatever community they belong, has a right to access the lifesaving benefits vaccines bring, and the long term protection they confer. The WHO South-East Asia Region is committed to strengthening immunization systems to protect and promote health throughout the lifecourse, and to achieve three of its eight Flagship Priorities: accelerating reductions in maternal, neonatal and under five mortality, eliminating measles and rubella, and achieving universal health coverage.

The Region has in recent years made substantial progress. Today, more than 32 million infants are fully immunized annually. More than 90% of the population has access to vaccines. The Region has maintained its polio-free status for almost 10 years, and polio immunization and surveillance performance continue to remain high. All countries have maintained the elimination of maternal and neonatal tetanus and most are implementing post-elimination sustainability plans. By mid-2020 four countries had controlled hepatitis B through immunization, five had eliminated measles, and six had controlled rubella. The Region is committed to ensuring all women and girls have access to the HPV vaccine, which is crucial to protecting against cervical cancer.

The Region's achievements and its ongoing progress are an immense source of pride for WHO and its Member States and are testament to the commitment and hard work of health leaders, doctors, nurses and millions of health workers and volunteers supporting immunization programmes. The stories contained herein provide a snapshot of the perseverance, patience and dedication that made this progress possible, and which will help maintain it as we respond to COVID-19 together while ensuring essential health services are operational and accessible to all.

The ongoing efforts of millions of health workers – including Krishna and Rekha from India, Razia and Shaina from Bangladesh, and Sarita from Nepal, whose work is documented in these pages – will be critical to supporting community health in these challenging times. For many communities, health workers and volunteers responsible for immunization are the most trusted sources of health information. They are effective communicators and understand community concerns. They can reach the unreached and underserved. They often have detailed knowledge of a patient's health history. We must continue to harness the Region's immunization infrastructure, both routine and supplementary, to advance the health and wellbeing of all, and to strengthen the emergency response.

WHO and its Member States remain committed to achieving the Region's Flagship Priorities, contributing towards WHO's "triple billion" targets, and advancing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal targets. Immunization is one of the most cost-effective ways for us to achieve these objectives, and to make immediate and lasting gains for the health of individuals, communities and countries. Our vision is of a South-East Asia Region free of vaccine preventable diseases, where all people have equitable access to high-quality, safe, efficacious and affordable vaccines and immunization services. Together we must make that vision a reality, and maintain our winning trajectory.

Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh Regional Director

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DEDICATED TO HEALTH WORKERS

Health workers in the South-East Asia Region are on the front lines delivering immunization and other essential health services. Our joint success combatting vaccine-preventable diseases is a result of your work.

The health workers depicted here in **Celebrate Life!**Vaccination is Protection embody the unwavering commitment of health workers everywhere.

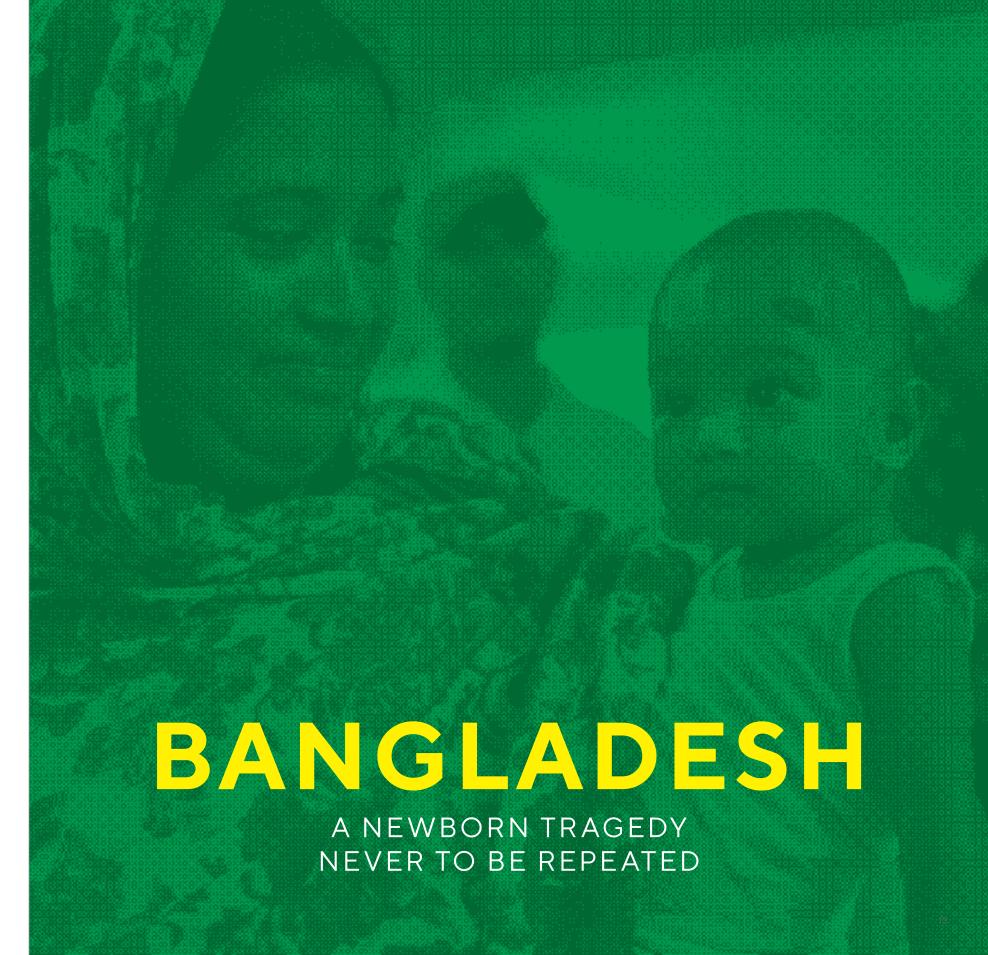
We all depend upon you at some point in our lives, but too often we take your commitment for granted.

Your dedication, passion and courage deserve our deepest gratitude and admiration.

Your service to people and communities saves countless lives and makes a difference every minute of every day. This is especially true now as we tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

We vow to work with you and support you to end the pandemic, and continue in our quest to achieve a world in which all peoples attain the highest possible level of health.







FARDIN

Fardin stares right at you. He looks intensely ready for the world. Dark hair frames his tiny face, and a blanket of pink, yellow and white cradles his new body. His pudgy hand reaches to a single delicate thumb. His mother's. Jesmin.

Fardin came into the world on

- eleven days after his birth. He died suffering violent convulsions that thrust his body into a backward arch, a locked jaw he couldn't open to feed, and fever. He succumbed to neonatal tetanus.

Jesmin clutches his photograph. It's the only one she has. Then she looks

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Jesmin Akter, then 18 years old, with a photo of her infant son Fardin. Fardin died of tetanus when he was just 11 days old.