

Routine immunization coverage and regulations: best interventions for Georgia

Policy Dialogue

7 May 2018

Tbilisi, Georgia

Summary Description

Sabin Vaccine Institute (Sabin), in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, is organizing a policy dialogue with immunization partners and key stakeholders influencing immunization in Georgia. The dialogue will discuss findings from recent research conducted by Sabin, explore the most effective and appropriate approaches for the country, and identify key interventions to improve routine immunization coverage in Georgia. **The meeting will be held on 7 May 2018, at Courtyard Marriott Hotel.**

Background

To date, Georgia has achieved significant progress in immunization, however the country still faces some challenges. According to the recent immunization data of the annual Joint Reporting Form on Immunizationⁱ, DTP3 vaccination coverage indicators in Georgia for 2015-2017 varies from 91-93.7%. and measles outbreaks happen periodically. To develop the immunization program successfully and achieve the targeted 95% coverage, with financial support from Gavi and technical assistance of partner organizations, there have been several large-scale studies to identify the character and causes of the immunization coverage problems.

One study, conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)ⁱⁱ in 2015-2016, revealed that the national immunization program is performing well in Georgia and provides access to children's planned immunization, introduction of new vaccines and implementation of new technologies. However, it noted there are still significant disparities across geographical regions in indicators such as vaccination timeliness, completed vaccination schedules and overall child mortality rates. A UNICEF surveyⁱⁱⁱ (KAP survey) highlighted that the reasons for coverage problems included low awareness on immunization among caregivers and doctors, vaccine hesitancy, false contraindications, lack of systemic approaches to promoting immunization coverage and a lack of cross-sectoral coordination. Both studies also concluded that not all the opportunities of the immunization system are used sufficiently and the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia needs to develop complex measures together with key stakeholders and ensure proper regulatory framework to improve immunization program results.

In March 2017, at the Regional Legislative Workshop on Immunization, convened jointly by Sabin and the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, representatives of the ministry and the parliament declared their readiness to initiate institutional changes in the system and carry out effective evidence-based interventions. To support evidence-based decision-making process, Sabin conducted a survey to explore stakeholders' opinions on preferable interventions for improving immunization coverage and studied international experiences through a literature review.

Scope and purpose

The policy dialogue aims to facilitate an informed discussion based on recent research between government officials and immunization stakeholders in order to foster effective institutional changes and advance Georgia's immunization system.

The scope of the discussion, which will be guided by the findings of a recent study - *Routine immunization coverage and regulations: recommended interventions for Georgia* – and will narrow in on evidence-based holistic interventions that address immunization demand, service provision and inter-sectoral collaboration.

Goal and Objectives

Goal: Develop a road map for implementation of priority interventions to sensitize stakeholders and advocate for change.

In order to achieve the goal, the dialogue will seek to achieve the following objectives:

1. Engage key country stakeholders and share findings and present evidence that support the need for interventions focused on improving vaccine demand, increasing immunization service provision and promoting intersectoral coordination.
2. Gather relevant expertise to analyze the current regulatory environment and identify regulatory mechanisms, and determine the feasibility of proposed interventions.
3. Identify systemic approaches and integrated mechanisms that motivate immunization service providers to develop their knowledge and skills in vaccination and ensure continuity, access and quality of services.

Description of the meeting methodology

The policy dialogue is a five hour meeting and consists of three sessions with presentation, group work and a panel discussion.

1. Presentation session will describe, analyze and evaluate the recommended interventions out of research findings and provide the information about:
 - a. intervention methods for increasing vaccine demand;
 - b. the role of regulations for vaccine uptake in general and for proposed interventions;
 - c. the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in implementing and monitoring adherence to each proposed intervention;
 - d. possible social, economic, organizational, legal, and financial impact of each solution;
 - e. the potential legal and non-legal solutions;
 - f. international practice;
 - g. feasibility of each intervention in the Georgia context

The session will be ended with Q/A section and a short guided discussion to get participants' feedback on the study findings and prioritize recommended interventions.

2. Break out group session will focus on a particular set of findings and discuss it in detail in order to develop a road map for implementation of priority interventions. Participants will work in 4 groups:

- a. Group 1 - demand-side institutional interventions
- b. Group 2 – supply side interventions: quality of immunization services
- c. Group 3 – motivation and payment
- d. Group 4 – stakeholders’ roles and collaboration

Finally, a panel discussion will be dedicated to reporting out from each group and facilitating a broader discussion on priority interventions and next steps going forward. The session will conclude with closing remarks from the Georgian officials and Sabin.

Participants

Approximately 50 participants are expected to participate in the policy dialogue meeting:

- Government and parliament representatives:
- Decision-makers and technical people from the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs:
 - Minister, deputy ministers, NCDC management, EPI team, healthcare and universal healthcare departments, regulatory agency, legal department
- Legislators – parliamentary members from the committees on health and education
- Ministry of Education and Science
- Local governments and local public health centers
- Prime minister’s office
- National Immunization Advisory Group – NITAG
- Immunization service providers, managers of clinics
- Family medicine association
- Academic society of public health and local experts
- Representatives from local offices of international partners: WHO, UNICEF, CDC-Atlanta, WB, USAID, Rostropovich Fund

Expected results and outcomes

The key result expected from the policy dialogue is an updated and informed cohort of policy makers and stakeholders who can push forward activities to support the implementation of a coherent, up-to-date regulatory framework for immunization and provide tangible technical and political commitment to support the needs of Georgia’s immunization program.

To achieve this result, anticipated outcomes include:

- Decision-makers have learned the views and preferences of national stakeholders on immunization system and understand opportunities for improving effective and participatory decision-making process and further intersectoral collaboration.
- Key stakeholders have better understanding of possible interventions supporting immunization program performance and realize their strengths, weaknesses and feasibility
- Creation of a supportive environment for evidence-based regulatory and systemic change and if possible, an understanding of how Georgia’s experience can be useful for other countries in the region.

Follow up activities

Sabin will provide a short meeting summary report covering main discussion points, group read-outs and key insights. In addition, the results from the policy dialogue will be incorporated into the agenda and discussion of the regional parliamentary meeting in June 2018. The research findings and policy dialogue outcomes will be shared among MPs to advocate for a good practice of supporting evidence-based decision-making and participatory governance of immunization program.

ⁱ Annual Report on Immunization Performance of Georgia for 2016, Joint Reporting Form on Immunization, 2017, WHO-UNICEF

ⁱⁱ Immunization Coverage Survey in Georgia, 2015-2016, Atlanta-CDC

ⁱⁱⁱ Immunization (KAP) Survey in the Country of Georgia, 2016, UNICEF