

Access to vaccination for refugees from Ukraine needed to protect the most vulnerable among them from vaccine-preventable diseases



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Protecting the health of all, including refugees, is a priority concern for WHO as the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine continues to unfold. WHO is working with countries of the European Region to strengthen health system capacity to accommodate large numbers of refugees and ensure access to essential health services. Among many other health needs, refugees require access to vaccines.

“Equitable access to vaccines is a right for all, no matter where they are,” explains Dr Siddhartha Datta, Regional Advisor for WHO/Europe’s Vaccine-preventable Diseases and Immunization Programme. “Vaccination against diseases such as COVID-19, measles and poliomyelitis (polio) is especially important for the population groups most at risk of severe outcomes. For COVID-19, this is older adults and people with underlying health conditions, and for the routine vaccines, young children need to be up to date with all scheduled vaccine doses.”

Many of the countries in the European Region receiving refugees from Ukraine are already offering vaccination services to children and adults. This is important to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission among people travelling or living in close quarters, to protect the refugees from diseases that may be circulating in the host country, and prevent any outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles and polio.

Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Moldova and Romania in particular have seen large numbers of refugees crossing the border from Ukraine over the past weeks. WHO is working with these and other

countries to strengthen disease surveillance and ensure provision of immunization services in line with the immunization schedules and policies of the host countries.

WHO/Europe recommends that all countries in the Region:

To maintain high population immunity against polio and mitigate the risk of importation and circulation of poliovirus, it is important for all individuals and population groups to receive equitable access to and administration of polio vaccines in accordance with the national immunization schedules for children and adults of the host country.

As some countries of the Region are still considered endemic for measles and rubella, refugees should be vaccinated against these diseases as a priority to protect them from infection in host countries, in line with national vaccination schedules of the host country.

To prevent severe COVID-19 disease and deaths and reduce morbidity, including post-COVID-19 conditions, COVID-19 vaccines should be offered to all refugees according to eligibility criteria defined in national COVID-19 vaccination policies of each host country.

Furthermore, access to vaccination services shall be facilitated both for individuals at temporary common shelter sites and for those who stay within local communities.

Administered doses for any of the above vaccines shall be recorded and documentation shall be made available to vaccinated individuals for further reference (on paper and/or electronically).

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