

Building a Community of Practice to Assist HepB Birth Dose Introduction in African Countries

The Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination/TFGH (CGHE), in collaboration with the Global Immunization Division/CDC (GID) and WHO, will convene stakeholders in a community of practice toward the successful introduction and scale-up of birth dose of hepatitis B (HepB) vaccine for member states of the WHO African region (AFRO). From March - June 2021, meetings will be held as on-line webinars or, as COVID-19 precautions permit, in a hybrid online/in-person format. Participants will include: CGHE, CDC, WHO, Gavi, country EPI managers, NITAG members or Secretariats, and hepatitis B researchers and technical assistance (TA) providers working in target countries that have not introduced the HepB birth dose vaccine* and also select countries that have already introduced the vaccine.

Objectives of these webinars include:

- Develop a community of practice of practitioners to support African countries in the introduction of HepB birth dose vaccine
- Present updates from WHO AFRO, Gavi and the US CDC on HepB birth dose progress in the region
- Map the current and upcoming projects related to HepB birth dose underway by Ministry of Health, research and TA partners
- Identify the needs and priorities of Ministries of Health, EPI programs, and NITAGs who wish to introduce HepB birth dose vaccine
- Present a toolkit of resources to support NITAGs in evidence generation in support of HepB birth dose vaccination recommendations
- Identify opportunities to coordinate technical assistance and operational research to meet the priorities of Ministries of Health, EPI programmes, and NITAGs for introduction of HepB birth dose vaccine

Webinar 1: The Current State of HepB Birth Dose Introduction Efforts (March 17-18)

The initial meeting sets the stage for the series. Discussion topics will include the burden of HBV among children in the AFRO region, status of infant HepB vaccination beginning with a timely birth dose, triple (HIV, HBV, syphilis) elimination initiatives, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic response on the routine infant immunization coverage. Research and technical partners will present on their current activities. Discussion time will allow EPI managers, Hepatitis Focal Points, and other Ministry of Health representatives to connect with research and technical partners implementing projects in their countries.

Objectives met

- Present updates from WHO AFRO, Gavi and the US CDC on HepB birth dose progress in the region

- Map the current and upcoming projects related to HepB birth dose underway by research and TA partners

Proposed speakers

- HepB birth dose researchers/ TA providers
- WHO AFRO
- WHO HQ
- CGHE
- Gavi

All participating researchers, and TA providers will be asked to provide brief updates on their program activities over the course of the meeting.

Expected outputs

- Profiles of MoH activities (intent to introduce) and key research and TA partners supporting introduction of HepB birth dose
- Framework for key opportunities and challenges related to introduction and scale-up and maintenance of HepB birth dose

Webinar 2: Sharing country experiences (mid-April)

This meeting will highlight countries in AFRO to discuss ongoing work in country programs and identify the TA, research, and information/resources needed to help countries introduce a birth dose of HepB vaccine and related HBV prevention strategies. The webinar will explore the utility of a Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) for EPI managers introducing and seeking to scale up HepB birth dose vaccination and related strategies.

Objectives met

- Develop a community of practice of practitioners to share lessons learned in support of the introduction of HepB birth dose vaccine in African countries
- Identify the needs and priorities of Ministries of Health and EPI programs who wish to introduce HepB birth dose vaccine

Proposed speakers

- EPI managers or Hepatitis Focal Points
- Gavi

Expected outputs in meeting report

- Case studies of ongoing efforts related to HepB birth dose in at least four countries (one each from: West Africa, Eastern Africa, Central Africa, and Southern Africa).

Webinar 3: Training on Steps NITAGs to make a recommendation for HepB birth dose (late May)

This meeting will highlight evidence and information that NITAGs need to develop appropriate recommendations for HepB birth dose introduction. NITAG or EPI representatives from countries in AFRO that have implemented a birth dose of HepB vaccine will present how they made their recommendations (i.e.- the Gambia, Senegal or Botswana). A toolkit or resource packet will be developed in advance and will be presented during this webinar.

Objectives met

- Identify the needs of NITAGs who wish to introduce HepB birth dose vaccine
- Introduce a draft toolkit of resources to support NITAG in evidence generation in support of HepB birth dose vaccination recommendations

Proposed speakers

- NITAG members from AFRO countries with HepB birth dose
- EPI managers
- CGHE/TFGH Center for Vaccine Equity
- US CDC- GID's NITAG strengthening team
- WHO AFRO/NITAG Officers

Expected outputs

- Toolkit for NITAGs to support a recommendation to introduce HepB birth dose

Webinar 4: Next steps (late June)

This meeting wraps up the series and finalizes plans for additional technical assistance, including support to countries in writing Gavi applications to support HepB birth dose introduction. These follow-up plans may include a Project ECHO for EPI managers introducing and scaling up HepB birth dose vaccination and related strategies. The agenda will be flexible and will be developed as the webinar series progresses.

Objectives met

- Identify opportunities to coordinate technical assistance and operational research to meet the priorities of Ministries of Health, EPI programs, and NITAGs for introduction of HepB birth dose vaccine

Proposed speakers

- WHO AFRO
- US CDC
- EPI managers, Hepatitis Focal Points, and NITAG members
- CGHE

- Project ECHO

Expected outputs

- Roadmap to support introduction of HepB birth dose in target countries
- Commitments from partners on future support of introduction of HepB birth dose
- Launch of a HepB Birth Dose Introduction ECHO—if this is of interest to EPI programme managers

*AFRO countries that have not introduced a birth dose: Burundi, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Congo, the Comoros, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, Malawi, the Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Seychelles, Chad, Togo, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Countries that have already introduced HepB birth dose that may be invited include: The Gambia, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa

Webinar format

- Each webinar will be 1-2 days with 1 session per day, no session will last more than 3 hrs
- Each webinar will have a rapporteur and meeting report
- Simultaneous French translation will be provided
- Breakout rooms could be used for smaller discussions