World Immunization Week, which takes place in the last week of April every year, is an opportunity to remind families and communities how effective vaccines can be, and to encourage people to take action to ensure that more children, and increasingly people in other age groups, are immunized against deadly and debilitating diseases.

Today, immunization averts 2-3 million deaths each year from diseases such as diphtheria, measles, pertussis, pneumonia, polio, rotavirus diarrhoea, rubella and tetanus.

One important driver of this progress has been the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI), which celebrates its 40th anniversary in May 2014. The EPI has been established in all countries. At the global level, EPI brings together partners to work towards ensuring that everyone has the chance to be fully immunized. Priority is given to some 40 nations where routine immunization coverage is lowest, and to the districts within those countries where children are least protected. When EPI was established, just 5 per cent of the world's children were receiving basic immunizations. Now this figure stands at more than 80 per cent.

Yet, 40 years on, the job is still not done. More than 22 million of the world's children (about one-fifth of infants) are still not being immunized with basic vaccines.

This year, with the slogan "Immunization for a healthy future. Know, Check, Protect", the World Health Organization and its partners around the globe are encouraging people to learn more about which vaccines are needed to prevent deadly illnesses, to check to see if their family's immunizations are up- to-date, and to seek out vaccination services so that all family members are protected.

One way in which we are working with partners to help this happen is by encouraging use of new mobile and Internet technologies. A number of countries are now delivering information about vaccination directly to people's mobile phones and social media accounts.

Getting reliable information to those who need it is key to increasing access, and to helping countries implement the Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP) endorsed by the World Health Assembly in May 2012. The Action Plan aims to prevent millions of deaths by 2020 through more equitable access to existing vaccines for people in all communities.

For more information visit: www.who.int/world-immunization-week