Presenting NITAG: The National Immunization Technical Advisory Group in Lebanon



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Introduction

The National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG) is an independent advisory body mandated to provide the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) with scientifically grounded recommendations related to the **Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI).**

NITAG collaborates with other national and regional immunization advisory groups, such as RITAG, and works closely with national experts. Its role includes offering both regular and emergent independent guidance on immunization programs, as well as making recommendations on immunization priorities.

Objective

Empower and advise the national government, Ministry of Health, National Immunization Programme (NIP), and/or other relevant institutions and organizations on all technical and scientific topics related to vaccines and immunization.

Mandate

The terms of reference of NITAG Lebanon are to advise

- 1. Latest scientific advancements and recommendations
- 2. Situation analysis and assessment
- 3. Policy analysis and strategy formulation

NITAG Lebanon has a technical advisory role for all vaccine preventable diseases. Accordingly, diseasespecific technical advisory groups, such as polio, measles, hepatitis, etc...will function under the auspices of the NITAG.

NITAG Lebanon mandate may include additional areas of responsibility, including, but not limited to:

- 1. Vaccine policy: review and provide recommendations to improve national immunization programme policies, including data collection, quality of services provided, and vaccination coverage.
- 2. Immunization programme assessment: conduct annual assessment of the immunization strategic plan using country and regional indicators and report to the Regional Technical Advisory Group.
- 3. Vaccine administration: create standards for vaccination schedules, vaccine procurement and storage, routes of administration, dosing, and contraindications.
- 4. Vaccine safety: develop standards for reporting events supposedly attributable to vaccination or immunization (ESAVI); evaluate ESAVI; and advise on health policy issues related to vaccine safety.
- 5. Vaccine impact: advise on the monitoring of the impact of technical recommendations including vaccine effectiveness and impact.
- 6. Vaccine preventable diseases surveillance: support the creation of standards for surveillance of VPDs, and standard operating procedures and protocols for disease reporting and specimen collection.
- 7. Vaccine preventable diseases elimination: support an independent process to document and verify evidence during the stages of VPD elimination, e.g., measles,

rubella, congenital rubella syndrome.

8. Anticipation of the needs of the NIP: monitor trends in VPDs, identify research gaps and guide the NIP in leveraging existing resources or creating partnerships to address the identified needs. Review the progress in the development of new vaccines and the potential for their inclusion into the NIP.

NITAG Lebanon

The NITAG Lebanon was established on September 10, 2021 (Appendix 1). The secretariat is hosted in the MoPH. The group consists of 13 members, as well as representatives from UNICEF, WHO, and a decisionmaker from the MoPH. The members bring a diverse range of expertise, including:

- General paediatricians
- Vaccinologist
- Obstetrician and gynaecologist
- Pediatric infectious disease specialist
- Family medicine physician
- · Pharmacist
- Epidemiologist

Main Activities

The main activities of the NITAG Lebanon since its establishment are:

2021: Establishment of NITAG Lebanon 2022-2023:

- Introduction of 3-dose of Rotavirus vaccine (at 2, 4, and 6 months or age)
- Introduction of the second dose of IPV [Injectable Polio Vaccine] in the National Immunization Program/Calendar
- Recommendations on Cholera Vaccination during the Cholera outbreak in Lebanon

2023-2024:

- Prioritization activity to switch from PCV13 to PCV10 1- Strong knowledge base [PCV: Pneumococcal Conjugated Vaccine]
- Recommended influenza vaccination for high-risk groups

2024-2025:

- Worked on the introduction of the HPV vaccine and Threats to NITAG Lebanon: recommended it to the MoPH
- Conducted a Cluster Survey on uptake of child 2-Security issues immunizations
- Supported the bOPV/MMR campaign [bOPV: Bivalent system

Oral Polio Vaccine; MMR: Measles, Mumps, Rubella]

- Supported the Influenza vaccination campaign
- Applied for membership in the Global NITAG Network

Process

The NITAG Lebanon provides regular recommendations to the MoPH through a structured Evidence-to-Recommendation (EtR). Occasionally, NITAG forms sub-working groups to focus on specific topics. (Figure 1)

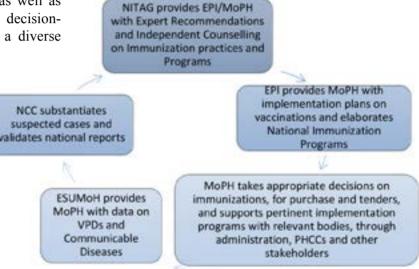


Figure 1: NITAG Process

Strengths of NITAG Lebanon:

- 1- Diverse expertise within the team
- 2- Strong collaboration with MoPH, WHO, and UNICEF

Weaknesses of NITAG Lebanon:

1- Budgeting challenges and dependency

Opportunities to NITAG Lebanon:

- 2- WHO EMRO, NITAG, and RITAG capacity building initiatives [RITAG: Regional]
- 3- Excellent network connections
- 4- Mandatory reporting and data collection

- 1- Ongoing multiple crises in Lebanon
- 3- Fragility of support to an overstretched public health

- 4- Shortages of healthcare workers (HCWs) and among children under 5 years old. emigration
- 5- Regional security threats

Goals and Next Activities

The goals and activities of NITAG Lebanon are:

1. Strengthen Program Sustainability & Coordination

• Enhance coordination among NITAG, EPI, EsuMoH [Epidemiology Surveillance Unit], and NCC [National

Certification Committee] to ensure seamless program implementation.

• Ensure multi-year planning and consistent funding to sustain vaccine programs, including annual vaccine procurement.

2. Meet Regional Vaccination and **Disease Control Targets**

- · Maintain polio-free status and ensure consistent routine vaccination coverage.
- Achieve disease elimination and control targets for measles and rubella.
- Achieve >90% DPT3 [Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus] coverage at the national level, with ≥80% coverage in each district.
- Meet regional vaccination targets at all administrative levels.

3. Prioritize At-Risk Populations

· Focus on the prioritization and management of vaccination efforts for at-risk groups to ensure equitable access.

4. Leverage Partnerships & Global Collaboration

- Strengthen regional partnerships through RITAG.
- Actively engage as a member of the GNN.

5. Ensure the Introduction of New Vaccines Based on National **Priorities**

• Support the timely introduction of new vaccines in line with national immunization priorities.

6. Support Hepatitis B Control & **Elimination Goals**

• Achieve the regional hepatitis B reduction target by reducing HBsAg prevalence to <1%

7. Achieve Long-Term Sustainability Beyond 2026

• Develop strategies to sustain immunization programs beyond 2026, ensuring continued progress and success.

8. Respond to Emerging Health Threats

· Contain, mitigate, and control waterborne diseases (WBDs) as part of a comprehensive public health response



Appendix 1: Decision related to NITAG Lebanon







Health and Hygiene concerns are paramount to proper healthcare, Controlling food safety and applying the latest hygiene procedures.

تؤمن شركة فرسو تجهيزات مطبخية رفيعة المستوى و مجموعة متكاملة من المعدات لنقل الصواني في المستشفيات للرعاية الصحية

