

# Presenting NITAG: The National Immunization Technical Advisory Group in Lebanon



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## Mandate

The terms of reference of NITAG Lebanon are to advise on:

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, disease-specific 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,

## 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.

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 decision-maker 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 [NIP]
- Recommendations on Cholera Vaccination during the Cholera outbreak in Lebanon

**2023-2024:**

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

**2024-2025:**

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

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

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

## 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)

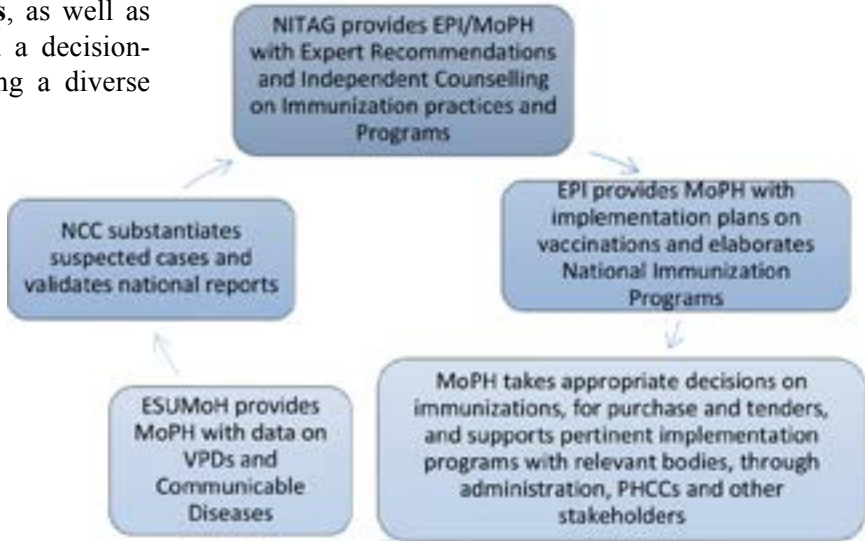


Figure 1: NITAG Process

## SWOT

### 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:

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

### Threats to NITAG Lebanon:

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



