**World Immunisation Week 2021**

**[Huma Khawar](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/huma-khawar)**

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What stood between Saima’s children and their chance at getting immunisation against life-threatening diseases was the voice booming out of a handheld loudspeaker. That voice made all the difference.

Of all the challenges life has thrown 24-year-old Saima’s way, a lack of awareness has perhaps been the most detrimental. She is clueless about the dangers of her severe malnourishment, her pregnancies have been unplanned, and she blames the solar eclipse for the cleft palate of her seven-month-old baby Zunaira. Saima and her husband Nasir—a 34-year-old daily wager—live in Meerabadi, a katchi abadi in sector E-12 in Islamabad. Neither their first child, a daughter who is five years old, nor the baby Zunaira, had ever been immunised.

The Covid-19 pandemic that hit the world last year, exacerbated the troubles of this community as people restricted the entry of domestic help, mostly women to their homes. Saima, was one of them. As a result, Saima lost her job and remained unemployed since the lockdown was imposed to contain the swelling numbers of Covid 19. Like other homes of Meerabadi, Saima’s home is a tarpaulin skinned dwelling with no basic facility like electricity, toilet or water, further adding to their woes.

[KTA delegation meets Imran Ismail at Governor House Karachi](https://nation.com.pk/03-May-2021/kta-delegation-meets-imran-ismail-at-governor-house-karachi)

Soon after the lockdown was lifted, a civil society organisation started door-to-door awareness in the slum community, to restore immunisation by making announcements on the loudspeaker. Walking along the muddy unpaved lanes, they came around Saima’s home and inquired about her children’s immunisation status and were told that both the girls were ‘zero dose’. The team talked to residents to educate them about the importance of vaccination and taking prompt action with local vaccinators the very next day, and took them to Meerabadi where an outreach session was arranged. Zunaira was vaccinated along with the other eligible children.

In May, analysis by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance revealed that disruption to routine immunisation services had put 80 million children under one year old at risk of contracting vaccine preventable diseases. The preliminary unofficial data indicates a 15 percent decline in children vaccinated in the first half of the year compared with the same period in 2019. Pakistan was one of them. World Immunisation Week (WIW) 2021 is commemorated from April 24 to 30 every year. The theme this year ‘Vaccines bring us closer’ shows how vaccination connects us to the people, goals and moments that matter to us most, helping improve the health of everyone, everywhere throughout life.

[Queen marks Northern Ireland's centenary](https://nation.com.pk/03-May-2021/queen-marks-northern-ireland-s-centenary)

However, it comes at a time when the world has entered a new phase of the pandemic; more transmissible and lethal Covid-19 variants have caused a resurgence of the disease. Today, vaccines are being rolled out around the world. Getting the jab has become a celebration, a topic of everyday conversation and a photo opportunity for the media. Furthermore, it is a ray of hope, as we now have a way of ending this pandemic and expect life to return to (somewhat) normal.

However, the end of the pandemic is far from over as a global vaccine divide still looms large. According to the website of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, one in four people has received a Covid-19 vaccine in high-income countries while in low-income countries, only one in more than 500 people.

To protect the world against the spread of new variants, the roll-out must continue at an unprecedented speed. Delay in getting the vaccine gives the virus a chance to mutate and increase the threat. No one is safe until everyone is safe, because infectious diseases do not respect borders.

[PM announces 'no compromise' over blasphemy law](https://nation.com.pk/03-May-2021/pm-announces-no-compromise-over-blasphemy-law)

Pakistan started its vaccine roll out in the first week of February. On April 24, 93,445 doses of vaccine were administered across Pakistan, making a total of more than 1.843 million doses administered so far.

Equitable access to a vaccine, particularly protecting healthcare workers and those most-at-risk—wherever they are and whatever their income level—is the only way to mitigate the public health and economic impact of the pandemic on individuals, communities, and nations.

As the government makes efforts to secure a sustained supply of vaccines for the country, it is important to generate demand as well. There is a very fine line between the lack of information and vaccine hesitancy.

CSOs can play a critical role in bridging the communication gap, engaging with the communities to create demand, remove misconception and build trust in the vaccine. Their unique connections with communities enable them to address the compound challenges of misinformation and vaccine hesitancy that have not only impacted routine immunisation, but also threaten the success of COVID-19 vaccine roll-out.

[WHO welcomes Sweden’s 1M jabs donation to COVAX](https://nation.com.pk/03-May-2021/who-welcomes-sweden-s-1m-jabs-donation-to-covax)

Without the support from her local civil society organisation (CSOs), Saima’s children would have remained completely unvaccinated. She is now a step closer to being healthier and safer. #VaccinesWork to bring us closer.