

Overview of Programs

Today the RVF is supporting sustainable public health programs to promote the health of children and youth in the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan. RVF plans to launch programs in additional countries both within and outside the former Soviet Union in 2008 – 2009.

Current programs cover a wide range of public health concerns:

Modernizing the Vaccination of Children

In 2006 the RVF completed a nationwide vaccination initiative against hepatitis B in the Russian Federation . Over 2 million adolescents and at-risk health care workers were vaccinated during the 5-year course of the initiative. Now the Russian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare is continuing this important work with its own resources. As the next critical step in modernizing vaccinations in Russia, the RVF has turned its attention to the introduction of the vaccine against Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib). Hib can cause serious infections in young children leading to brain damage or death. Infants in Western countries are routinely vaccinated against Hib disease. Recent epidemiological studies sponsored by the RVF had shown a heavy burden of Hib disease at multiple study sites throughout Russia. Therefore the RVF has partnered with local and national health authorities to conduct pilot vaccination programs against Hib in European Russia as well as the Russian Far East. The long-term goal is to work with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to protect all children in Russia from the ravages of Hib disease by including the conjugate Hib vaccine in the National Immunization Calendar.



Elena Rostropovich (foreground), president of the VRF, and co-founder Galina Vishnevskaya at a recent visit to a maternity hospital in Tbilisi, Georgia

In the Transcaucasus countries of Georgia , Azerbaijan, and Armenia, the RVF is supporting national programs for the routine vaccination of children against measles, mumps and rubella, which are in various stages of attaining financial self-sustainability. The programs are part of the strategy of the World Health Organization (WHO) to eliminate measles and prevent congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) throughout the European region by the year 2010. In order to accelerate the elimination of measles and more effectively prevent congenital rubella syndrome, the RVF also supports mass immunization campaigns in these countries. In March 2006 the RVF, in cooperation with WHO, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the Ministry of Health of Azerbaijan, completed a mass immunization campaign against measles and rubella (MR) in Azerbaijan. Over the course of four weeks, nearly 3 million children and young adults were vaccinated against MR, effectively eradicating measles and preventing congenital rubella syndrome in the country. Similarly, the RVF helped mount a mass immunization campaign against MR in Armenia in October of 2007 in which all individuals ages 6 years to 27 years - a total of 923, 910

individuals - were vaccinated, equating to a coverage rate of 98% of the target population. In Georgia the RVF is working with the Ministry of Health and other partners to prepare for an MR campaign to be conducted in the fall 2008 which will protect over one million children and young adults. Thus all three Transcaucasus countries are expected to be certified free of measles and rubella by the WHO by the year 2010. The RVF is gratified to be playing a key role in making this advance for the sake of children in the region a reality.

Deworming

A new initiative of the RVF focuses on eliminating intestinal parasites among school-aged children. Intestinal parasites cause reduced growth rates, learning problems and malnutrition in children. Treatment with the drug mebendazole or albendazole is safe, highly effective, and inexpensive. A successful pilot program targeting 16,000 impoverished children in Azerbaijan, conducted jointly with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) was completed during 2006-2007. In September 2007 RVF and MOH expanded the de-worming program to benefit 150,000 children ages 7 to 12 years in 17 districts.

In September 2008 RVF and MOH expanded the de-worming program to benefit additional 100,000 children ages 7 to 12 years in 29 districts. In March 2008 RVF launched a pilot de-worming program in Kyrgyzstan targeting 400,000 individuals in the country with population of 5 million people. In addition to the Kyrgyz Ministry of Health and the RVF partners in the program include WHO, UNICEF, and the Swiss Red Cross. Recognizing that intestinal parasites pose a serious problem to the healthy development of children in many parts of the world, the RVF expects to expand the de-worming initiative to other countries by 2009.

Screening and Prevention Programs

In Georgia the RVF has initiated programs to screen all pregnant women for hepatitis B, HIV/AIDS, and all newborns for hypothyroidism. These programs, conducted entirely by trained local health personnel, protect newborns from acquiring AIDS and Chronic Hepatitis B infection from their mothers through timely, aggressive medical intervention, and they prevent permanent mental retardation and growth failure in newborns through early detection of hypothyroidism.

Social Rehabilitation of Neglected and Disaffected Youth

Over the next three years, the RVF plans to use a substantial proportion of its resources on HIV prevention, treatment, care and support among children and youth, focusing on the reintegration of institutionalized HIV positive children and youth into society and outreach programs for street children, many of whom are HIV positive.

Automation of Medical Data and Disease Surveillance

In Azerbaijan, the RVF has partnered with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Information and Technology, as well as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency of USA (DTRA) to put in place an Electronic Integrated Disease Surveillance System (EIDSS) in Azerbaijan. EIDSS will integrate human and veterinary case data to provide comprehensive epidemiological information in near real time to the appropriate health authorities, thereby making possible

a timely and effective response on a national and – if necessary – transnational level. EIDSS is expected to be fully operational by the end of 2008.

In the Russian Federation the RVF has partnered with local health departments to automate vaccination reporting systems. Many regional health departments in the country still rely on hand-written records, rendering disease surveillance cumbersome and inefficient. With the supply of computers, standardized software, and the training of personnel, the RVF is helping to transform the immunization reporting system in the country into a useful tool for timely disease surveillance.