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# Strategies for continuing immunizations during the Covid-19 pandemic in Tucuruí, PA

**ABSTRACT** | Objective: to report the strategies created for the continuation of the immunization process for influenza and measles, during the Covid-19 pandemic, in a city in the interior of Pará. Methods: it is a descriptive study, of the type Experience on carrying out strategies to increase the vaccination coverage of Influenza and Measles in the municipality of Tucuruí, in the interior of the state of Pará. The actions were organized and developed by the Municipal Coordination of Immunization and Basic Health Units (BHU) of Tucuruí. Results: protocols were created for work in the midst of a pandemic, there was the organization of BHU for vaccination, there were moments of vaccination at home, days of massive vaccination were carried out. Also, through radio and TV programs, health education was carried out on the importance of immunization. Conclusion: the experiment had been successful in reaching its audience, overcoming barriers imposed by the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Immunization; Vaccination Coverage; Pandemics; Nursing.

**RESUMEN** | Objetivo: reportar las estrategias creadas para la continuación del proceso de inmunización contra influenza y sarampión, durante la pandemia Covid-19, en una ciudad del interior de Pará. Métodos: es un estudio descriptivo, del tipo Experiencia en la realización de estrategias para incrementar la cobertura de vacunación de Influenza y Sarampión en el municipio de Tucuruí, en el interior del estado de Pará. Las acciones fueron organizadas y desarrolladas por la Coordinación Municipal de Inmunización y Unidades Básicas de Salud (UBS) de Tucuruí. Resultados: se elaboraron protocolos para trabajar en medio de una pandemia, se organizó la UBS para la vacunación, hubo momentos de vacunación en el domicilio, se realizaron jornadas de vacunación masiva. Asimismo, a través de programas de radio y televisión se realizó educación en salud sobre la importancia de la inmunización. Conclusión: el experimento había logrado llegar a su audiencia, superando las barreras impuestas por la pandemia.

**Palabras claves:** Inmunización; Cobertura de Vacunación; Pandemias; Enfermería.

**RESUMO** | Objetivo: relatar as estratégias criadas para a continuidade do processo de imunização para a influenza e o sarampo, durante a pandemia de Covid-19, em uma cidade do interior do Pará. Métodos: trata-se de um estudo descritivo, do tipo Relato de Experiência acerca da realização de estratégias para o aumento da cobertura vacinal de Influenza e Sarampo no município de Tucuruí, interior do estado do Pará. As ações foram organizadas e desenvolvidas pela Coordenação Municipal de Imunização e Unidades Básicas de Saúde (UBS) de Tucuruí. Resultados: foram criados protocolos para o trabalho em meio a pandemia, houve a organização das UBS para a vacinação, aconteceram momentos de vacinação em domicílio, foram realizados dias de vacinação massiva. Ainda, por meio de programas de rádio e de TV, foi feita educação em saúde acerca da importância da imunização. Conclusão: a experiência fora bem-sucedida ao alcançar seu público, superando barreiras impostas pela pandemia.

**Palavras-chaves:** Imunização; Cobertura Vacinal; Pandemias; Enfermagem.

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## INTRODUCTION

The vaccination process, as well as the first vaccine, was discovered and created by the Englishman Edward Jenner, after observations and tests with the smallpox virus, located in wounds of cows, placing it in the human organism and following it in the

long term. Hence the name "vaccine". Vaccines work with the human body, inducing an acquired immune response. In addition, vaccines, if well disseminated, even lead to the eradication of diseases, hence their importance in the field of public health. <sup>(1)</sup>

Immunization has changed the course of history by promoting a relevant decline in the mortality rate of numerous infectious diseases, preventable with vaccination. The immunization process takes place as one of the lowest cost procedures for public health agencies, paralleling its great effectiveness in guaranteeing the promotion of the health of individuals. <sup>(1-2)</sup>

In Brazil, the main responsible for vaccination is the National Immunization Program (PNI), established in the 1970s. The success in reducing the mortality rate

from infectious diseases related to the increase in vaccination, came from the good functioning and the strategies organized by the said program.<sup>(3-4)</sup>

Unfortunately, in 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a state of pandemic, after the spread of a new coronavirus (SAR-VOC-2), which caused several symptoms, including: fever, loss of chemical senses, breathing difficulty and, in severe cases, severe acute respiratory syndrome. Its easy transmission was due to factors such as contaminated objects and surfaces and close contact with contaminated people, from respiratory particles. From that, the WHO decreed the distance and social isolation, as the most effective preventive measures in the fight against Coronavirus Disease - Covid19.<sup>(5-6-7)</sup>

The social isolation measures recommended by WHO and other health agencies, at the federal and state levels in Brazil, directly influenced the promotion of vaccination promotion by the PNI. Therefore, coordinators and health secretaries were under an obligation to outline strategies for the continuation of immunization, during the pandemic period, of the general population, respecting all health protocols to combat the Coronavirus.<sup>(8)</sup>

In this context, the present study aims to report the strategies created for the continuation of the immunization process for influenza and measles, during the Covid-19 pandemic, in a city in the interior of Pará.

## METHOD

This is a descriptive study, an experience report type resulting from the development of strategies to increase the vaccination coverage of Influenza and Measles in the municipality of Tucuruí, in the interior of the state of Pará. The actions were organized and developed by the Municipal Immunization Coordination and Basic Health Units (UBS) of Tucuruí.

These strategies were carried out con-



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tinuously from the month of February to the month of November 2020, comprising, then, the planning and implementation processes of the actions taken. The individuals involved in the actions include the nurse and the person in charge of the Municipal Immunization Coordination, as well as nurses, nursing technicians and community health agents from the Basic Health Units (UBS) and Family Health Strategies (ESF) of Tucuruí.

Therefore, the strategies are best evidenced through categories presented in the results of this study, namely: organization of the UBS for vaccination, vaccination at home, holding D-Day Municipal Vaccination Against Influenza and Measles, health education through programs TV and radio.

Finally, the guidelines of resolutions 466/2012 and 510/2016 of the National Health Council of the Ministry of Health were respected. Based on this, due to the work being a report of the authors' own experience, without data manipulation human beings, it was not necessary to submit it to a Research Ethics Committee.

## RESULTS

Bearing in mind the anticipation by the Ministry of Health (MS) of the National Influenza Vaccination Campaign to March 23, 2020, due to an emerging need to decrease the number of people infected by the flu virus, at this time of pandemic, the Municipal Immunization Coordination of Tucuruí formulated and applied several strategies to increase vaccination coverage in that municipality.

During the month of February 2020, the nurse and responsible for the Municipal Immunization Coordination of Tucuruí carried out the stage of planning strategies for increasing vaccination coverage in the municipality. For this organization, online meetings were held, with the help of the "Zoom" virtual application, with nurse coordinators and nursing technicians from the Basic Health Units (Uni-

dades Básicas de Saúde - UBS) of Tucuruí.

About the meetings with the coordinators, the strategies were planned and discussed, which were: vaccination at home for the elderly and holding D days. In addition, protocols for work in the midst of a pandemic were created, therefore, basically, these documents addressed issues of prevention of Covid-19 contagion, how to maintain social distance and correct use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

With regard to the meetings with the nursing technicians of the UBS, in these the issues of how the dynamics of work inside the units' vaccine rooms would work were discussed, as well as about the correct filling of the vaccination reports, which are launched, daily, in the database of the Municipal Coordination of Immunization of Tucuruí, which forwards them to the competent higher bodies.

#### Organization of UBS for vaccination

For the organization of the UBS for vaccination of Influenza and Measles, the guidelines recommended by the Ministry of Health, of social distance and verification of symptoms of Covid-19, at the entrance of places with potential for the spread of the virus were taken into account.

Thus, in the Basic Health Units, vaccines continued to be made available to priority groups of Influenza, with the distribution of passwords and waiting organization, with the referred social distance between individuals. With regard to Measles, vaccination was found to be distributed to all individuals from 20 to 49 years of age.

For a greater reach of the elderly and individuals in the risk group, who were not exposed to vaccination at the unit, the strategy of home vaccination was drawn from the systematized knowledge, through family records, of the families of the neighborhoods, available in the Health Strategies Family and constantly updated by Community Health Agents.



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#### Vaccination at Home

One of the first strategies adopted for the start of the National Influenza Vaccination Campaign in the municipality of Tucuruí, was vaccination at home with the elderly, given that they are one of the priority groups for vaccination, as well as being considered a risk group for Covid-19 infection, and it is necessary to maintain their social isolation.

In this context, five teams of professionals were assembled, these composed of nurses, nursing technicians and community health agents, who were divided between the neighborhoods of the municipality and started the mass vaccination process. The municipality of Tucuruí has an estimated population of 115.144 inhabitants, distributed in 40 neighborhoods, according to the census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.

The aforementioned moment occurred from March 23rd to 26th and covered more than 300 households, all containing elderly residents, the target audience for these actions.

#### Municipal D-Day for Vaccination Against Influenza and Measles

About Municipal D-Day, which took place in several municipalities in Brazil, in Tucuruí, these took place at two different times, on the days: July 18th and August 29th, 2020. On these days, all UBS in the city, organized and carried out the intensification of the vaccination campaign against Influenza and Measles, in its own physical space, as well as in public places such as markets and municipal squares. In this case, the influenza vaccination was directed to the priority groups, which are: the elderly, pregnant women, children, puerperal women, indigenous people, teachers and armed forces.

In addition, the measles vaccine had been distributed indiscriminately to individuals aged 20 to 49 years. Consequently, in addition to these preventive intensifications, as well as the practice of health education practices, the vacci-

nation booklet of the individuals present there was also updated, which had been obsolete or outdated.

### TV and Radio Shows

In order to consolidate and make individuals aware of the importance of immunization, especially during the pandemic period, against Influenza and Measles, the city government signed an agreement with the local radio and television networks.

This agreement made it possible to create constant informational moments within the programming grid of these networks, being, therefore, about three times a week, from a period from March 23rd to August 31st, 2020, the nurse and responsible for the Municipal Coordination of Immunization participated in conferences and journalistic interviews. At such times, statistical data on the numbers of vaccinees and the importance of prevention for the fight against Influenza and Measles were addressed.

In addition, pages were created on the Internet's social networks, in which every day posts were made about how immunization is essential, that is, in order to further increase the scope of the population receiving the information.

Finally, it was possible to realize that the measures organized and put into practice by the Municipal Coordination of Immunization and Basic Health Units (UBS) of Tucuruí had good effects, since numerous daily bulletins of vaccination coverage were produced in the municipality, which, confirm that a large part of the citizens of Tucuruí are immunized against influenza and measles.

### DISCUSSION

Immunization, through the vaccination of individuals in a society, is understood as a primary care activity, and should be offered in a universal and equitable way.<sup>(9)</sup> From this, we must understand that immunization, through active immunization processes, is one of the main ways to

guarantee both individual and collective protection against various infectious pathologies, such as influenza and measles, with their efficiency directly linked the high rates of adherence and vaccination coverage of the population.<sup>(10)</sup>

Therefore, strategies, such as those reported here, are essential to ensure the population's awareness of vaccination. Organized health education actions are capable of influencing behaviors, such as making individuals more concerned about their immunization.<sup>(9)</sup>



Immunization, through the vaccination of individuals in a society, is understood as a primary care activity, and should be offered in a universal and equitable way.



It is essential that, especially during the new coronavirus pandemic, measures to increase the number of individuals immunized against infectious diseases be increased. Infectious diseases, such as measles and flu, show symptoms and signs similar to those of Covid-19, so we must ensure that individuals are immunized against the greatest number of possible pathologies, so that health services

do not suffer more impacts, in addition to already caused by the pandemic.<sup>(8)</sup>

Regarding the strategy planning process, reported here, one of the measures taken during the meetings between the Municipal Immunization Coordination and the employees of the UBS of Tucuruí was the creation of work protocols in the midst of the pandemic. Such a measure was taken, because in situations like this, of a pandemic, it is necessary that during the development of activities innumerable care be taken, in order to guarantee both the protection of professionals and patients, therefore, creating protocols is a fundamental action.<sup>(11-12-13)</sup>

In the 20th century, vaccination at home had been the motivation for one of the most popular revolts in Brazil, the Vaccine Revolt.<sup>(14)</sup> The motive that led to the trigger of the movement was part of a larger context, the health reform, coordinated by the hands of the sanitary doctor, Oswaldo Cruz. A century later, the reason for such a revolt, is again necessary in the current context. In the face of the crisis caused by the new coronavirus pandemic, measures to prevent contagion are based on social isolation.<sup>(5-6)</sup>

In the condition of the elderly, as well as children and pregnant women, these, being part of the risk group, the need to continue the immunization process, offered by the PNI of the Unified Health System, is extremely necessary, taking the coordinators of the health systems. public health, to develop strategies and plans for carrying out vaccines at home, following strict safety criteria to continue the health promotion process.<sup>(8-15)</sup>

For the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), immunization against influenza and measles remains a health priority, together with the control of the Covid-19 crisis. In the Americas, from January 1st, 2019 to January 24th, 2020, 20,430 measles cases, including 19 deaths, were confirmed in 14 countries and territories.<sup>(16)</sup>

Keeping the vaccine portfolio up to date is one of the main reasons for the low incidence and mortality rate of se-

veral contagious diseases in Brazil, having even eradicated diseases from the country, as in the case of smallpox. <sup>(1-2)</sup> The continuation of the vaccination process, through means such as vaccination D-Day, which establishes a mass vaccination target in a short period of time, encouraged by health agencies such as the Ministry of Health and PAHO, extreme need so that we can face the current context of the pandemic, preventing other health crises from setting in. <sup>(16-17)</sup>

The use of media means of communication in health education practices is

not new in Brazil. <sup>(18-19)</sup> However, the use of these has never been more necessary than in the context of the coronavirus crisis. Media such as TV and Radio have a high potential to disseminate information, taking these to different communities, whether riverside or rural, thus facilitating the dissemination of health promotion acts, such as vaccination periods or campaigns. The result of using these media is extremely positive, taking into account greater public adherence to what was explained, as exemplified in several studies. <sup>(20)</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Therefore, it is concluded that alternative practices and strategies in the processes of campaigns and immunizations, during the coronavirus crisis period, are extremely necessary, considering possible health problems, caused by the negligence of the vaccination act. The experience had been successful in reaching its audience, overcoming barriers imposed by the "new normal", established by the context of the pandemic. 🐦

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