

## **SERBIAN PEDIATRICIANS' POSITION STATEMENT ON CHILD IMMUNIZATION**

Adopted at the regular annual scientific-professional conference, *The 48th Paediatric Days of Serbia*, held in City of Niš, October 5-7, 2017

Serbia's paediatricians,

Deeply aware of the fact that immunization is unparalleled and vital for the implementation of the children's right to health, as well as the fact that immunization is one of the most effective and most efficient primary prevention measures as well as the most successful modern medical intervention;

Consistent in advocating for the immunization of children, as part of our professional, ethical and statutory duty, and determined to persevere in the on-going *battle for immunization*, which we also pledged to do in the conclusions of the Second Congress of Serbian Paediatricians (2014) and of the "Battle for Immunization" Round Table (2015);

Concerned about the declining rate of coverage of children with mandatory immunization in recent years, which resulted in outbreaks of measles, mumps and pertussis, followed by a higher sporadic incidence of the disease, which is preventable by immunization, and which, considering the unfavourable epidemiological situation in the neighbouring countries and elsewhere in Europe, increases the risk for new outbreaks;

Recognizing the difficulties and problems encountered in the process of implementation of immunization in the recent years, starting from failures in the planning process, through the lack of timely and comprehensive provision of vaccines as well as the reorganization of vaccination points, all the way to the intensification of the activity of opponents of immunization (the so-called anti-vaccination movement/lobby), whose influence on the public opinion and parent's views on immunization is not negligible;

Hereby adopt this

### **STATEMENT ON CHILD IMMUNIZATION**

1. The paediatricians of Serbia support all measures endorsed by global professional and scientific institutions and organizations (World Health Organization, UNICEF, International Association of Paediatricians, European Paediatric Association) as well as by national ones (Dr Milan Jovanovic Batut Public Health Institute of Serbia (PHIS), Serbian Medical Society and others), with the aim of reaching and preserving the collective immunity of the population to infectious diseases through immunization.

Paediatricians shall actively engage in the implementation of the right of the child to health:

- by promoting immunization in their daily health education activities with parents and other target groups, to ensure that they gain scientifically-based knowledge and develop proper attitudes and conduct in relation with vaccination, endorsed by compelling personal examples, emphasizing the irreplaceable role of immunization in protecting children and the entire population from infectious diseases,

- through their continuous professional development and participation in the training of staff involved in immunization activities on all aspects of safe immunization practices.

2. The intensification of the activity of opponents of immunization significantly affected the public opinion and parents' view on immunization. Unfortunately, a number of physicians (in all truth, very few) succumbed to the influence of the anti-vaccination propaganda, while a few physicians, including some eminent paediatricians and faculty professors, publicly advocate against vaccination. Other paediatricians express a hesitant, indecisive or "neutral" position, whereby they objectively endorse both the anti-vaccination movement and parents who are against immunization or are in favour of unduly delaying it.

The paediatricians of Serbia shall fulfil their professional and ethical duty towards the preservation of public health, by combating all forms of anti-vaccination activity:

- by advocating and disseminating objective, scientifically tested, clear and unambiguous views on the benefits of vaccination,

- by drawing the general public's and parents' attention to the dishonest motives of the anti-vaccination movement, and to the fact that their views lack any scientific base, and are often even void of common sense,

- by most strongly condemning the anti-vaccination activity of colleagues and other health professionals which constitutes a professional and ethical violation of the University Code of Professional Ethics,

- by inviting colleagues who declare themselves against vaccination to submit their arguments to scientific verification in the customary manner in the scientific/academic community.

We invite

- the relevant state authorities to draft a national action plan for counteracting the activity and impact of the anti-vaccination lobby,

- the Parliamentary Committee for Health and Family, the Ministry of Health, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU), the Serbian Medical Chamber, the Serbian Medical Society and all other medical and health professionals' societies and associations, medical faculties and schools, PHIS with its network of institutes, as well as healthcare organizations and private practices, to collaborate on promoting positive attitudes towards immunization as one of the greatest achievements of modern medicine,

- the media, both printed and electronic (especially those with national coverage), to impartially inform the general public about the benefits and positive effects of immunization, and to steer clear of sensationalism, unverified information and dissemination of anti-vaccination views.

October 6, 2017

Paediatric Association of Serbia

In Niš, 6 October 2017