

Beirut, 5 March 2014 – The Ministry of Public Health, the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF announce the launch of a third nationwide polio immunization campaign as part of the continued efforts to keep Lebanon’s children safe from polio. The six-day campaign, which starts on 10 March, aims to reach almost 600 000 children under the age of five years in Lebanon regardless of nationality.



Mass polio vaccination campaign is being launched in Lebanon on the 10th of March 2014“Once again we come together with UNICEF and WHO to ensure Lebanon’s 12 years of polio free status is maintained.” said Mr Wael Abou Faour, Lebanon’s Minister of Public Health at a press briefing to announce the launch. “It is vital that every child under the age of five is vaccinated even if they have received the vaccine before at a health centre or a private clinic. Even one unvaccinated child puts all other children in Lebanon at risk.”

For this round of the immunization campaign, the Ministry of Public Health, UNICEF and WHO have partnered with the Lebanese Order of Physicians and the Lebanese Pediatric Society to ensure that children who might have missed out on the vaccination during the last two rounds are reached this time.

WHO will be providing logistical support to the health district office. UNICEF will be providing private sector paediatricians with 300 000 doses of the polio vaccine, in addition to 1.7 million doses provided to the Ministry of Public Health, to ensure that children can get the vaccine for free regardless where they are receiving health care.

“Thanks to the efforts of the Ministry of Health and all our partners we were able to keep Lebanon polio free but we must continue to be vigilant.” said Ms. Annamaria Laurini, UNICEF’s representative in Lebanon, adding “We cannot allow the fact that Lebanon has been, and still is free of polio, lull us into inaction. Protecting Lebanon’s children from a potentially deadly disease is in our hands and with these repeated campaigns we aim to ensure that polio has no chance of circulating in the region.”

Dr Hassan El Bushra, WHO Representative in Lebanon, noted, "The first two rounds of national immunization days have been great success stories. The vigilance, dedication and hard work of the staff of Ministry of Public Health have prevented re-introduction of polio viruses into Lebanon. WHO will spare no effort to keep Lebanon free of poliomyelitis. WHO provided technical support, conducted field assessment; and together with the Ministry of Public Health developed and funded implementation of micro-plans related to national immunization days."

During this campaign parents in Lebanon’s cities and villages are asked to bring their children to the nearest health centre and outpatient departments for vaccination. In the meantime partners and outreach teams will be mobilized to vaccinate children in more than 460 informal tented settlements where many of the Syrian refugee families reside across Lebanon.

This campaign follows two previous rounds of polio vaccination campaigns that have reached almost 590 000 children under five years of age, around 98.4% of the target group. The campaigns are part the largest ever immunization response in the Middle East aiming to prevent the spread of polio in the region after 25 cases were confirmed in Syria.

The third round of the national polio immunization campaign will be followed in April by an expanded immunization campaign for polio, measles and rubella in addition to vitamin A supplementation. WHO and UNICEF will also be mobilizing their network of partners in Lebanon in order to support the Ministry of Public Health in reaching almost one million children aged between 9 months and 18 years old.

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