



6 December 2019 – The Ministry of Public Health, in partnership with WHO and UNICEF, announced today the beginning of the national drive to fight the ongoing measles outbreak in Lebanon. Since onset in early 2018, the outbreak has spread to all 8 governorates, accounting for more than 2000 reported cases, most among children under-10 years of age.

“To stop the ongoing outbreak, all children from 6 months to 10 years of age in all 8 governorates must be vaccinated,” said Dr Jamil Jabak, Minister of Public Health. “To this effect, the Ministry, in partnership with WHO and UNICEF, will conduct a national immunization campaign, targeting total 915 750 children through primary health care centres, dispensaries, schools, nurseries and private clinics. All children from 6 months to 11 months of age will receive an additional dose of vaccines against measles and polio, and all children from 12 months to 10 years will also receive an additional dose of vaccine against measles, mumps and rubella, regardless of nationality and previous measles vaccination status. The first phase of the

campaign will start 7 December and run until 22 December in Akkar, North, Baalbeck-Hermel governorates. The second phase will follow in early 2020 to cover the rest of Lebanon”.

Measles is a highly infectious airborne viral disease, that mostly affects children and is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality. Yet, it is preventable through immunization. A safe and effective vaccine exists for measles and the Ministry of Public Health, through the Expanded Programme on Immunization, strives to immunize all children in Lebanon, to avoid preventable illness and outbreaks. However, measles immunization coverage rates have fallen far below the recommended threshold that is necessary to prevent illness and outbreaks.

Measles is caused by a virus and can lead to serious complications including pneumonia and inflammation of the brain that can cause permanent damage and be deadly, especially in children under-5 years of age. It is transmitted via droplets from the nose, mouth, or throat of infected persons. Initial symptoms, which usually appear 10–12 days after infection, include high fever, usually accompanied by one or several of the following: runny nose, conjunctivitis, cough and tiny white spots on the inside of the mouth.

“Lebanon has been observing a national measles outbreak since early 2018 affecting Lebanese and Syrian refugees alike,” said Dr Iman Shankiti, WHO Representative in Lebanon. “Following recommendations of an expert technical assessment of the measles situation, WHO is committed to supporting the Ministry of Public Health in the national measles campaign, through ensuring sufficient resources and technical support so that all children receive quality vaccination and that 'no one is left behind', and all children are protected from this potential serious disease”.

The national immunization campaign is funded through the generous support of the Kuwait Fund for Development and the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund and is targeting a total of 915 750 children aged between 6 month to less than 10 years old. All children will also receive vaccination with bivalent oral polio vaccine. Children will be reached in primary healthcare centers/dispensaries, schools, nurseries and private clinics.

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