

Islamabad, 9 October 2012 – Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf announced today the introduction of a new vaccine to protect Pakistani children from pneumonia – a disease that takes the lives of approximately 1.3 million children globally before their fifth birthday.

With this launch, Pakistan is the first country in South Asia to introduce the pneumococcal vaccine.

“As the first country in South Asia to introduce the pneumococcal vaccine, Pakistan’s commitment to immunizing all children against vaccine preventable diseases is to be applauded”, said Dan Rohrmann, UNICEF Pakistan Country Representative. “We are proud to partner with the Government of Pakistan in its efforts to inoculate millions of children against a disease that continues to take too many lives.”

The latest UN estimates indicate that pneumonia accounts for 18% of child mortality - the primary cause of death among young children globally. In Pakistan, more than 352 000 children die before reaching their fifth birthday and almost one in five of these deaths are due to pneumonia. While the new pneumococcal vaccines cannot prevent every case of pneumonia, they do prevent a significant proportion of cases and therefore have the potential to save tens of thousands of lives from preventable sickness and death.

“Today’s historic introduction of pneumococcal vaccine underlines our commitment to the children of Pakistan,” said Helen Evans, deputy Chief Executive Officer of the GAVI Alliance. “Through our partners on the ground and working with the Government of Pakistan we aim to reach millions of children with this lifesaving pneumococcal vaccine.

“I am pleased that the GAVI’s strong financial commitment is being matched by the will of the Pakistan Government to tackle a disease that needlessly claims the lives of tens of thousands of Pakistani children every year.”

The introduction of the pneumococcal vaccine is an important milestone in the fight to reduce the burden caused by pneumonia in Pakistan. The partnership between the Government of Pakistan and the GAVI Alliance – which includes UNICEF, WHO and civil society, among many

other partners – to deliver this life-saving vaccine to Pakistan's children, as well as a renewed commitment to strengthening the current routine immunization system, provides a solid foundation for a stronger, healthier nation.

“The World Health Organization welcomes the launch of the pneumococcal vaccine in Pakistan” said Dr Guido Sabatinelli, WHO Representative in Pakistan. “Above all, we must not lose sight of the heavy infant and child mortality burden facing Pakistan's families; the introduction of the pneumococcal vaccine represents an important milestone in the fight to reduce this burden. We look forward to working in partnership with the Government of Pakistan, UNICEF and the GAVI Alliance to deliver this life-saving vaccine to Pakistan's children. We also hope that procurement procedures can be streamlined and be made more efficient so that life-saving vaccines make their way to the communities that need it most.”

The pneumococcal vaccine is available in Pakistan thanks to GAVI's innovative Advance Market Commitment (AMC). The AMC provides incentives for manufacturers to produce large quantities of pneumococcal vaccine which can then reach developing countries as much as a decade earlier than they historically would have done. The AMC is funded by Canada, Italy, Norway, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

About WHO

The World Health Organization is the directing and coordinating authority on international health within the United Nations' system. WHO experts produce health guidelines and standards, and help countries to address public health issues. WHO also supports and promotes health research. Through WHO, governments can jointly tackle global health problems and improve people's well-being. 193 countries and two associate members are WHO's membership. They meet every year at the World Health Assembly in Geneva to set policy for the Organization, approve the Organization's budget, and every five years, to appoint the Director-General. Their work is supported by the 34-member Executive Board, which is elected by the Health Assembly. For more information, please visit: www.who.int .

About GAVI Alliance

The GAVI Alliance is a Geneva-based public–private partnership aimed at improving health in the world’s poorest countries. The Alliance brings together developing country and donor governments, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank, the vaccine industry in both industrialised and developing countries, research and technical agencies, civil society, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other private philanthropists. GAVI support consists of providing life-saving vaccines and strengthening health systems. Since its establishment in 2000, GAVI has financed the immunisation of more than 326 million children and prevented more than five million and a half premature deaths. For more information, please visit: www.gavi.org

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in 190 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world’s largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org.

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NOTE: Please contact Zeeshan Suhail for B-roll and high resolution images from the launch event.

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