



Deputy Minister of Public Health H.E. Dr Ahmad Jan Naeem delivers a speech at the Immunization Week launch in Kabul Kabul 25 APRIL 2016 – World Immunization Week was launched today in Afghanistan at an event attended by H.E. Minister of Public Health Dr Ferozuddin Feroz and key national and international partners supporting immunization activities in the country. The yearly Immunization Week campaign, celebrated this year under the slogan “Close the Immunization Gap”, seeks to raise awareness about the importance of vaccination and ensure that people take action to receive all required life-saving vaccines.

“Vaccination is one of the most effective health interventions we have. We need to step up our efforts to increase vaccination coverage by further strengthening Afghanistan’s routine immunization system and ensuring caregivers take their children to be vaccinated at health facilities and accept vaccines when they are being offered at their health facilities, villages and homes during immunization campaigns,” said H.E. Dr Ferozuddin Feroz, Minister of Public Health. “It is our duty to protect the children of Afghanistan from vaccine-preventable diseases. Immunization is the right of every single child.”

“It is unacceptable that children still die from diseases that can be prevented with vaccines that are safe and easily available. Immunization not only protects children against traditional vaccine-preventable diseases like measles but it also gives protection against diseases such as pneumonia which is a big killer of children under 5 years of age,” said Dr Richard Peeperkorn, WHO Country Representative. “We need to close the immunization gap and ensure that all Afghans are reached with the life-saving vaccines they need, no matter where they live.”

Mortality due to vaccine-preventable diseases has decreased in the past decade as a result of the Government's intensive immunization efforts supported by local and international partners. Maintaining a strong routine immunization programme, complemented by case-response vaccination campaigns and supplementary immunization activities in high-risk areas with low immunization coverage guarantee a wider reach for life-saving vaccines. However, Afghanistan's overall immunization coverage remains low with disparities throughout the regions. Around one-fifth of Afghan women and children have never been immunized against diseases – according latest vaccination coverage survey conducted in 2013, coverage for the measles vaccine is 59% and only 51% of children receive all antigens before the age of 1.

“Vaccination is a key health intervention in Afghanistan which has a potential of averting 35% of under-five deaths. We need to overcome barriers to reach all children. People need to understand the value of vaccines and help in mobilizing the parents to bring their children to the health centers and vaccinate against preventable killer diseases,” said Dr. Sherin Varkey, Chief of Health, UNICEF Afghanistan.

Immunization is one of the most successful and cost-effective health interventions preventing illness, disability and death from vaccine-preventable diseases including tuberculosis, polio, diphtheria, pertussis, hepatitis B, haemophilus influenza, pneumonia, tetanus and measles. Afghanistan's under-five mortality rate remains among the highest in the world at 97 per 1,000 live births. Afghanistan remains one of the two polio-endemic countries globally – in 2015, 20 polio cases were reported, compared to 28 in 2014. Four polio cases have been reported so far in 2016.

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