KABUL, Afghanistan, 1 September 2018 – The Government of Afghanistan, in collaboration with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, have today launched a nationwide vaccination campaign to protect children 13.8 million children aged 9 months to 10 years against measles.

At the launching ceremony, Afghan Minister of Public Health, H.E. Dr Ferozuddin Feroz, described this intervention as “life-saving and will have positive impact on child health”. He also acknowledged the ongoing support of partners who are working with the Ministry of Public Health to improve the lives of children in Afghanistan.
Nearly 14 million children in Afghanistan to be immunized against measles following a growing increase in number of reported cases

Measles is one of the most contagious infections known to humans, and ranks among the top 4 childhood killers worldwide. In Afghanistan, of the 25,000 reported cases in 2017, 85% are among children under the age of 10. This spans over 20 of the 34 provinces across Afghanistan, with the worst affected provinces being Kabul, Paktika, Kunar, Badghis and Ghor.

Speaking at the event, WHO Representative in Afghanistan Dr Richard Peeperkorn said: “Safe and effective measles vaccine has been in use for the past 60 years worldwide and in Afghanistan since 1984…we hope that this campaign will reach every child, especially the most vulnerable target population.” Dr Peeperkorn stressed the importance of routine immunization, which “remains the backbone of measles control efforts and contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals”.

The measles vaccine will be administered free of charge in all mosques, villages and health facilities throughout the country, targeting all children under the age of 10, irrespective of their previous measles vaccination status or history of disease. This campaign will be implemented in two phases. The first phase will run from 1 to 10 September targeting 16 provinces, including the most affected, at risk and accessible provinces. The second phase, from 17 to 26 November will cover the remaining 18 provinces.

“Immunization has been proven as one of the most cost-effective and lifesaving interventions against killer childhood diseases. Every girl and boy must be reached no matter who they are and where they live,” says Adele Khodr, UNICEF Representative in Afghanistan. “I call upon parents, caregivers, community leaders and all stakeholders to ensure that both girls and boys under the age of 10 years can safely reach a mosque or village health facility, so we can together save the life lives of millions of children in Afghanistan.” Khodr emphasised.

With the support of the GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, the upcoming campaign will cost approximately US$ 14.6 million (US$ 5.6 million for vaccines and US$ 9 million for operations) to cover procurement of 14.8 million doses of vaccine, logistics, training, measles case management and activating social networks in communities to ensure local buy-in.

“I congratulate the government of Afghanistan for this landmark campaign,” said Dr Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi the Vaccine Alliance. “Low vaccine coverage, mass population displacements and persistent insecurity have posed an immense challenge to measles control. Strengthening Afghanistan’s routine immunization must be a top priority to secure further reductions in mortality from this vaccine-preventable disease.”
The Afghanistan Demographic Health Survey of 2015 estimates that only 60% of eligible Afghan children receive their first dose of measles vaccine every year while less than 40% receive the second dose. Low coverage has led to approximately 300 deaths from the disease last year. Routine vaccination for children, combined with mass immunization campaigns remain key public health strategies to reduce global measles deaths.

For more information, contact:

**Ministry of Public Health**

Dr Nazary  
National EPI Manager  
Mobile: 0797223009  
Email: dastagger_nazary@yahoo.com

**WHO**

Jin Ni  
WHO Communications Officer, Mobile: +93 (0) 782 200 354  
jinn@who.int

**UNICEF**

Alison Parker  
UNICEF Afghanistan  
Mobile: +93 (0) 730 717 110  
Email: aparker@unicef.org

Feridoon Aryan  
UNICEF Afghanistan  
Mobile: +93 (0) 730 717 115  
Email: faryan@unicef.org

**Gavi**

Frédérique Tissandier