

Baghdad, Iraq, 14 April 2014 – The Ministry of Health of Iraq, with the support of UNICEF and the World Health Organization, has successfully completed a nationwide polio vaccination campaign, the first of its kind following a confirmed case of polio reported by the Ministry of Health in Baghdad on 30 March 2014, 14 years after Iraq had been declared polio free.

The campaign wrapped up in the governorates of Diwaniya, Duhok, and Najaf on 14 April 2014. Field independent monitoring activities have begun and will last for the next four days, implemented by WHO through teams recruited from the Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS). Complete campaign coverage data will be shared with the media at the earliest opportunity.

The nationwide immunization rounds were scheduled to cover all parts of Iraq; WHO's collaborative response to the outbreak is meant to reach the millions of vulnerable children under the age of 5. Health teams confirmed that the number of vaccinated children was increasing. Dr Ahmed Zuhdi, Director of Seidya Primary Health Care Centre in Seidya area southwest of Baghdad, said that the number of vaccinated children in the said area for 10 April reached 1834 . The head of the immunization unit in the said primary health care centre Dr Israa Jameel Najim, also added: "The current vaccination rounds witnessed unexpected eagerness by parents to have their children vaccinated."

Each primary health care centre has a vaccination team, in addition to the mobile teams distributed to areas of the capital Baghdad and governorates according to a plan put forward by primary health care centre directors and heads of the immunization units. Staff from WHO Baghdad Office voluntarily joined random vaccination teams in their field missions in some areas of Baghdad and reported admirable attendance of parents to vaccinate their children and dedication of vaccinators' teams to fulfill their task as efficiently as required. The long queue of families standing before the vaccination team in one centre in Baghdad to give their children the polio drops was remarkable. Mr Saad Abbas Muhamed, leader of a vaccination team in another centre in Baghdad said: "Many of the houses we visited informed us that they had given their children the vaccine in centres days ago; they did not even wait for the field teams to come to them with the vaccine."

Part of this massive immunization campaign success relates to people's awareness on the importance of vaccinating children below the age of 5; clerics, moreover, announced during Friday prayer preaches, the availability of vaccines in primary health care centres and urged populations to immunize their children and cooperate with the mobile vaccinators' teams visiting them in order to vaccinate their children.

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