

WHO amd MOH Iraq launch of a massive national campaign covering Iraq's 18 governorates. WHO Iraq photo

Baghdad, Iraq, 8 November 2021 – The World Health Organization (WHO), in partnership with the Iraqi Ministry of Health, yesterday launched a national COVID-19 mass vaccination campaign covering all of Iraq, including the Kurdistan region and targeting over 12 million people with children 12 years old and above.

The campaign which commenced today will last until 31 December 2021, and will certainly give momentum to the vaccine rollout process in Iraq to reach up to a 40% vaccination coverage rate among the general population by the end of this year.

"COVID-19 continues to be the biggest challenge of our time and we must all unite to overcome this devastating public health threat as no one is safe until we are all safe," said Dr Ahmed Zouiten, WHO Representative and Head of Mission in Iraq.

"WHO and the Ministry of Health in Iraq rose to the challenge of vaccinating the maximum number of people possible to control the COVID-19 pandemic as soon as possible, under the theme of "COVID-19 vaccine is a gateway to a normal life". Vaccination will be delivered in easy-to-access sites, open for longer working hours extending to the evening. There will be a lifesaving dose of immunity against this vicious disease for every Iraqi, no one should be left behind," Dr Zouiten added.

This new external vaccination setting will witness the opening of more than 100 external mass

vaccination sites distributed to the 18 Iraqi governorates based on the demographic situation, health indicators, and capacity of each governorate. The sites will further be supported by more than 225 vaccination and direct registration teams deployed with the required daily supply of vaccine doses.

This new COVID-19 inoculation arrangement will support the health system in Iraq to maintain the routine immunization programme, which has been significantly affected by the designation of health facilities for the delivery of COVID-19 health care services in 2020–2021.

"The Ministry of Health in Iraq and WHO are happy to announce the launch of a massive COVID-19 vaccination campaign today," said Dr Riyadh Al Hilfy, Director General of the Public Health Directorate in the Iraqi Ministry of Health. "The campaign will target a vast majority of the vaccine eligible population in Iraq through external vaccination outlets with on-the-spot registration. Our short-term goal is to vaccinate a minimum of 40% of our people, including our children aged 12 years upwards."

"Vaccines are now available, and we urge our citizens to go get their jabs. Let's stand by each other to overcome the difficulties resulting from this disease and bring life back to normal with determination and the support of our partners," Dr Alhilfy added.

The vaccine rollout process in Iraq started in March this year accessing 15.1% of the total population with the first dose and only 9.0% with the 2 vaccine doses as of 6 November 2021. Committed to WHO's global vision of scaling up vaccination coverage in all countries to 40% by the end of this year, the coverage rates in Iraq have raised the concern of health authorities and WHO in Iraq and necessitated urgent action to intensify vaccination activities in an innovative and accessible to all approach.

"WHO would like to reiterate that we cannot end the pandemic without COVID-19 vaccines. We will stop this pandemic only when the majority of people in Iraq take the vaccine, but vaccines should be complemented by public health and social measures. WHO calls upon citizens to take the opportunity of direct vaccine administration to stay safe and keep our loved ones safe," explained Dr Zouiten.

WHO Iraq would like to express its gratitude to the German people and Government for their

generous financial contribution which has enabled the planning and the implementation of this remarkable event, the first of the kind in the Region so far.

For more information, please contact:

Ajyal Sultany WHO Communications Officer +964 7740 892 878 sultanya@who.int

Baraa Sabaa WHO Communications Officer +964 07800010244 sabaab@who.int

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