November 2017 – For more than 3 years, the people of Hawiija district in Kirkuk governorate, Iraq, were cut off from lifesaving health care and immunization services, leaving many children susceptible to vaccine-preventable diseases. “For years, I worried that my children may contract polio and measles or die,” said Hadija, a 32-year-old mother of 3.

In September 2017, the district became accessible following military operations launched by the Government of Iraq. WHO, together with Kirkuk Directorate of Health, immediately deployed mobile medical teams to provide immunization services, and health care for people suffering from trauma injuries or chronic disease conditions.

Five mobile medical teams were deployed to Khan, Tal Ali, Abbassi, Masanaa, Al Zab and Ryadh areas. Since then, from mid-September to 15 November 2017, more than 10000 people in Hawiija district have benefited from WHO’s support, including 1563 children vaccinated against childhood immunizable diseases.

Although these newly accessible areas are still security compromised, WHO saw an urgency in delivering health care to thousands of people that had been cut off from aid for years, and whose health was being compromised day by day. Five main health facilities have been partially or completely damaged, in addition to Hawija general hospital. Currently, only the Kirkuk Directorate of Health and WHO-supported frontline health teams are delivering immunization services in these areas.
A child in Hawiija receives a measles vaccine from a mobile medical team member. Among the beneficiaries is Hadija, who brought 2 of her children to the mobile teams for vaccination. “I believe that vaccination prevents many childhood diseases and can save my children. I take this seriously and it has always been a top priority when it comes to the health of my children,” she said.

“Being cut off from regular health services worried me. I thought of my children and how they may become disabled or die. Now we have health teams that move around our village to ensure that not only children, but everyone has access to health care,” added Hadijah.

The WHO-supported mobile teams deliver a comprehensive package of lifesaving health services that include vaccination, medical consultations, medicines, referrals, health promotion and treatment for chronic conditions. In addition, the teams conduct water quality monitoring, and distribution of chlorine tablets at household levels.

An additional 30 mobile medical teams will be deployed to Hawiija on 3 December 2017 to vaccinate children during an upcoming immunization campaign.

To date in 2017, financial support from European Union Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), the Office of United States Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) and the Government of Germany has allowed WHO to deploy more than 70 lifesaving mobile teams to hard to reach areas and newly accessible locations across Iraq.

Related links

- European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
- United States Foreign Disaster Assistance

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