WHO Representative in Iraq and UNICEF Representative acknowledge success of campaign that aims to vaccinate more than 6 million children

Baghdad, 10 April 2019 – “I am very happy to be at this centre of this campaign” with these words, His Excellency the Minister of Health of Iraq Dr Alaa Alwan launched a 5-day polio vaccination campaign in Baghdad on 7 April 2019. “This is an important event for the health sector in Iraq. Poliomyelitis is one of the diseases that we have eliminated. With continuous vaccination campaigns, we will be able to eradicate polio through relentless efforts by health workers and the motivation of Iraqi families to vaccinate their children regardless of previous vaccination history.”
“No cases of polio have been reported in Iraq since 2014 and with the continuation of vaccination campaigns and the awareness of the population we will ensure that this disease will not return. We hope and seek to achieve a high rate of polio vaccine coverage, as well as other vaccines to ensure the highest possible level of health for all the people of Iraq,” added Dr Alwan.

The target population for this round of the campaign is 5,875,186 children under the age of 5 in 145 districts over 18 governorates. WHO is supporting the Iraqi Ministry of Health in providing technical and operational costs for the campaign, including incentives for health workers, training of vaccinators, stationary for the vaccination teams, in addition to transportation fees and independent monitoring.

More than 25,278 vaccinators are supporting the campaign to reach the target population along with 2,920 supervisors at the district, provincial and national levels. WHO is supervising the campaign to ensure the quality of the vaccination is up to the targeted level. The campaign is
monitored independently by 290 monitors and 38 supervisors from the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, in addition to a team of 12 competent WHO Polio Eradication Officers.

The campaign is part of the vaccination strategy in response to strengthening the immunity profile against polio. Vaccination teams are going house to house to ensure that all targeted children are covered. People living in slum areas, refugee camps and settlements, marginalized communities and internally displaced people are being targeted as part of the campaign.

In recognition of the campaign’s success, Dr Adham Ismail, acting WHO Representative in Iraq, said, “The campaign is a great achievement for WHO, UNICEF and the Iraqi Ministry of Health. It mirrors the achievements of the Ministry under Dr Alwan’s leadership. WHO provides support to ministries of health at federal, regional and subnational levels, prioritizing support to high-risk governorates. Children are being vaccinated against polio in order to protect Iraq and the future of its children.”

UNICEF’s Representative Ms Hamida Ramadhani Lasseko said at the launch, “The aim is to reach more than 6 million children, so we can boost immunity. We are working closely with the Ministry of Health and other partners to ensure that all children are vaccinated and no children are left behind”. She urged all parents to take their children to health centres and cooperate with field vaccinators assuring the public that the vaccine was safe.

Since April 2014, no new polio cases have been reported in Iraq thanks to the strong commitment of the Government and dedication of frontline health workers. There has been a significant improvement in overall population immunity in Iraq due to efforts made by the Ministry of Health of Iraq, Ministry of Health of the Kurdistan Regional Government and departments of health all over the country. The campaign helps to sustain population immunity gains as vaccination is the most cost-effective public health intervention and in addition to its positive impact on child and maternal health, when immunization rates are high, the wider community is protected.

For more information, please contact:

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WHO EMRO | Ministry of Health of Iraq, with the support of WHO and UNICEF, launches polio vaccination campaign

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