WHO EMRO | Libya launches nationwide campaign to vaccinate 2.7 million children against measles, rubella and polio

10 December 2018, Tripoli, Libya – WHO, together with the Libyan National Centre for Disease Control, the Ministry of Health, and UNICEF, have launched a national immunization campaign targeting more than 2 million children throughout Libya, including children in refugee and migrant shelters.

The campaign, which began on 8 December, and will continue for seven days aims to reach more than 2.75 million children aged between 9 months and 15 years with measles and rubella vaccines, along with vitamin A supplementation, and almost 1.5 million children aged between 0 and 6 years with the oral polio vaccine (OPV).

“WHO continues to support the Ministry of Health and work with local health authorities and partners to control disease outbreaks such as measles, and ensure high vaccination coverage for all Libyan children,” said Dr Syed Jaffar Hussain, WHO Representative in Libya. “It is unfortunate that measles cases are still being reported while there is an effective vaccine available. Children are the future of this country and we stand committed to protect them,” he added.

In 2018, Libya has reported a total of 1648 cases of measles, of which 942 were laboratory-confirmed, compared to 8 laboratory-confirmed cases in 2017. Delays in vaccine procurement and shortages in vaccine stocks contribute to the threat of disease spread. Libya is also a main transit point for many migrants and refugees, and high population movement poses further risk of infectious diseases re-emerging or quickly spreading. Unfortunately, migrant children are the most vulnerable due to malnutrition and overcrowded living conditions.
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Dr Badr al-Din Najjar, Director General of the National Centre for Disease Control, launched the campaign at the Wesayet Albuderi public health centre in Tripoli in the presence of H.E. Dr Omar Bashir Al Taher, Minister of Health, and representatives from WHO, UNICEF, IOM, and UNFPA.

During his opening speech, Dr Najjar encouraged parents, community leaders, and the media to support the campaign in its aim to achieve a 100% vaccination coverage rate. He also stressed the importance of health staff training and capacity-building initiatives to scale up measles surveillance with laboratory confirmation, improve measles case management, and achieve a routine measles vaccination coverage of 95%.

H.E. Dr Al Taher, Minister of Health, reiterated Dr Najjar’s enthusiasm as he thanked the partners for their collaboration and tremendous efforts. He stressed that every child in Libya should be vaccinated during this campaign and protected against measles and polio.

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