Amman/Cairo, 17 September 2014: UNICEF and WHO have been shocked and saddened to learn of the deaths of at least 15 young children in Idlib, Syria. The deaths of the children – all of whom were less than two years of age – occurred in districts where a measles immunization campaign had been under way.

Establishing the precise cause of the children's deaths is vital. To this end, WHO has assigned a team of experts to provide assistance in investigating this event. WHO is also providing advice and protocols for the investigation of adverse events following immunization.

For as long as the facts remain unclear, the suspension of the immunization campaign in both Idlib and Deir Ezzour provinces is a wise step.

However, it is vital that immunization efforts against measles – a disease which is a leading killer of children worldwide – resume in Syria as soon as possible.

Measles is a particular threat to children who have been displaced from their homes and communities, and who are living in camps or other insanitary conditions.

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