

UNICEF13 November – A comprehensive outbreak response continues to roll out across the Middle East following confirmation of the polio outbreak in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Seven countries and territories are holding mass polio vaccination campaigns with further extensive campaigns planned for December targeting 22 million children; in a joint resolution all countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region have declared polio eradication to be an emergency and called on Pakistan to urgently access and vaccinate all of its children to stem the international spread of its viruses. The countries also called for support in negotiating and establishing access to those children who are currently unreached with polio vaccination.

WHO and UNICEF are committed to working with all organizations and agencies providing humanitarian assistance to Syrians affected by the conflict. This includes vaccinating all Syrian children no matter where they are, whether in government or contested areas, or indeed outside the Syrian Arab Republic.

The first priorities are to resupply and reactivate the required health infrastructure, including redeploying health workers to deliver vaccine in worst-affected areas, and moving vaccine across conflict lines where necessary and possible. The government has committed to reach all children; information on which areas are not reached will guide corrective actions and planning for the next rounds. All parties are working to find solutions for conflict-affected areas.

Dr Jaouad Mahjour, Director of Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, stressed the necessity of reaching all children inside Syria and in neighbouring countries. "WHO and UNICEF are coordinating the vaccination campaign with all concerned parties to make sure that all children are vaccinated no matter

where they are located."

A larger scale outbreak response across the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries will continue, to last for at least six to eight months depending on the area and based on evolving epidemiology.

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