28 June 2022 - Between Saturday 18 June and Wednesday 23 June, health workers across Bethlehem and Jerusalem governorates, supported by WHO, UNICEF and UNRWA, gave an extra dose of polio protection to children under five during round two of the polio vaccination campaign.

Palestine has been polio-free for more than 25 years, but the regional risk of poliovirus is increasing. Following the detection of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 3 (cVDPV3) in sewage outflow in Wadi Alnar site, where there is a junction between wastewater coming from inside the green line with wastewater coming from Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the Ministry of Health launched a preventative vaccination campaign to boost children's immunity in those governorates.

The campaign saw children vaccinated at Ministry of Health and UNRWA health facilities, and through mobile health teams working in remote areas. The occupied Palestinian territory is a diverse place, in environment and culture, and though the campaign covered just two governorates, its story can be told in the faces and voices of those who took part.

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The remote health worker

Nurse Mohammad Rashaida is from the Bedouin community of Arab Al Rashaida. He is based in the clinic in the main village, but for two days during the campaign he led health outreach through the mobile health clinic to cover the outlying rural areas. Mohammad's personal connection to the people he serves motivates him, especially when the work is challenging. "It was hard work today because the roads are very difficult, and the weather is hot. In the coming week we will do another day in the remote areas so we can accomplish our mission."

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The registrar

Nurse Jamillah Elayyan greets a new patient before registering her details at UNRWA health clinic in Dheisheh Camp, Bethlehem Governorate on 20 June 2022. Every child who received OPV during the campaign had their name, date of birth and ID number or phone number recorded, to ensure an accurate record of which children were covered.

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The vaccinator at local health centers

“This campaign is being held so that children can benefit from an extra layer of protection, on top of their regularly scheduled polio vaccinations. I am doing my part in keeping children safe from polio, parents must do theirs,” said Mayada Zahiqa, Head Nurse at East Sawahra Health Center in Jerusalem governorate.

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The mother

Parents and caregivers are the heart of polio vaccination campaigns. Their willingness to

vaccinate children is crucial in keeping Palestine polio-free. Thanks to Palestine's strong culture of vaccine acceptance, despite juggling work, childcare and other commitments, parents and caregivers prioritised their children's vaccination and turned up to health centers during round-two of the campaign.

Nedaa, mother of Basel, Mahmoud and Mustafa ,all under the age of five, has taken time out from her busy day to ensure that her children are protected from polio by receiving an extra dose of protection. "Just as my children's health is a priority for me, I'm sure it is the same for all mothers too. This is why we should ensure that our children receive the polio vaccine vaccine today, to protect their tomorrow."

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The grandparent

Fatima Salman Rashaida hands her grandchildren's health records to nurse Afaf Abu Ajamieh in the Bedouin community in Arab Al Rashaida, in Bethlehem governorate. Fatima, who doesn't know her age and counts at least 60 grandchildren, puts a priority on immunization: "The vaccine is good, it protects us and prevents disease."

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The father

Muhye gives a cuddle to daughter Lya, 9 months, after she gets her two drops of oral polio

vaccine at Al-Sawahreh Sharqiyya Health Center. Like the vast majority of parents, Muhye is a staunch believer in the importance of vaccines as a vital link in the healthcare chain – even if it means tears for little Lya.

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The cold chain manager

Riham, a nurse at the Al-Ezariyyeh Health Directorate, Jerusalem, hands over carefully marked polio vaccine packages to nurses for safe transportation to health centers. “My morning has started early today. I’m making sure polio vaccine vials reach all 28 health centers covered under Al-Ezariyyeh Health Directorate. I’m overseeing the process.”

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