

More than 32 million children will be immunized against measles, an exceptionally contagious and deadly virus, in 2 weeks

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan - October 15, 2018 – Today, the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) joined the Government of Pakistan in kick-starting a nationwide measles campaign to vaccinate more than 32 million children – one sixth of the population.

During the two weeks of the campaign, all children between nine months and five years of age will be targeted for vaccination against the deadly measles virus which attacks the respiratory tract and is exceptionally contagious.

“In line with the vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan, we are paying special attention to the health and wellbeing of mothers and children in Pakistan,” said Mr. Aamer Mehmood Kiani, Honourable Minister for National Health Services regulations and Coordination. “I urge all parents to vaccinate their children against measles virus during the nationwide anti-measles vaccination campaign being launched by the government.” More than 110 000 professionals are mobilised across Pakistan to help eliminate measles -- a disease that can be prevented with a simple vaccine. More than 32 000 suspected cases of children infected with the virus have been reported in the country since the beginning of the year.

“Since 2000, the safe measles vaccine has saved more than 20 million children's lives in the world. Every death or disability caused by this disease is now an unacceptable tragedy,” said Dr. Nima Saeed Abid acting WHO Representative in Pakistan. “This mass measles campaign will help to stop the current measles outbreak and show the strong political commitment of Pakistani Government toward the global measles elimination for the benefit of all children in the world,” he added.

Measles remains a leading cause of death among children, with survivors often left with life-long disabilities such as blindness, deafness or brain damage.

“From the Ministry to front-line workers on the ground, from the north-western mountains to the

southern coastline, everyone is mobilized to ensure that no child is left behind,” said Ms. Aida Girma, UNICEF Representative in Pakistan. “Every child, including those living in hard-to-reach and remote communities, will receive the vaccine thanks to the exceptional efforts of health workers and social mobilisers working in fixed sites, but also in outreach or mobile teams,” she added.

The US\$ 30 million mass immunisation campaign is taking place in all provinces and areas of the country between 15 and 27 October 2018. It is funded by the Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance (GAVI) and the Government of Pakistan.

The campaign will contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3, which aims to end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five years of age by 2030.

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### **About the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**

UNICEF promotes the rights and well-being of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere.

### **About the World Health Organization (WHO)**

WHO's works together with policy-makers, global health partners, civil society, academia and the private sector to support countries to develop, implement and monitor solid national health plans. In addition, WHO supports countries to assure the availability of equitable integrated people-centered health services at an affordable price; facilitate access to affordable, safe and effective health technologies; and to strengthen health information systems and evidence-based policy-making.

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