13 May – Ramallah - On Monday 16 May, the Palestinian Ministry of Health will launch round one of a polio vaccination campaign targeting all children under age five in Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

The vaccination campaign is scheduled to run over three days: Monday 16 May through Wednesday 18 May 2022. Vaccination, using bivalent oral polio vaccine (bOPV), is free and will be offered at maternal and child centres and UNRWA centres throughout Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

Palestine has been polio-free for more than 25 years, thanks to a robust routine immunization programme and a strong culture of vaccine acceptance. But 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 has taken the decision to launch a preventative vaccination campaign to boost children's immunity in the two areas deemed most at risk: Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

"It is all of our duty to keep Palestine polio-free by making sure that our children under the age of five receive the polio vaccine every time it is offered. I encourage every parent to make it a priority to vaccinate their children – for their sake, and for Palestine," said Dr Mai al-Kaila, Minister of Health, Palestine.

The vaccination campaign is being carried out with support from WHO, UNICEF and UNRWA's Palestine country offices.

"WHO's Palestine office has provided technical support to the Ministry in planning and executing this campaign, drawing on the extensive expertise of our regional polio eradication programme. Palestine is in a strong position thanks to its routine immunization programme and to the value Palestinian parents put on childhood immunizations, but the regional risk of polio is increasing and it is absolutely crucial that we reach and vaccinate every child under age five in the target areas," said WHO occupied Palestinian territory Representative Dr Rik Peeperkorn.

"It is critical that every child can access their right to a life free from polio and other vaccine-preventable diseases. UNICEF and its partners in this campaign are making every effort to ensure no child in Palestine will be affected by this debilitating disease. It is a duty upon all of us to keep Palestine polio free," said UNICEF's Special Representative to the State of Palestine Lucia Elmi.

Round two of the campaign will take place in June and will offer all children under age five a second two drops of polio vaccine, further boosting their immunity. Children living outside of Jerusalem and Bethlehem do not currently require an additional dose of oral polio vaccine. If their routine immunizations are up to date, they are well protected from poliovirus and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

Poliovirus primarily affects children under age five and can lead to lifelong paralysis. It can easily be prevented through vaccination. Parents are urged to accept polio vaccines every time they are offered.

The vaccination campaign in Palestine is part of the global effort to eradicate poliovirus, spearheaded by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative.

**Media contacts**

Damian Rance
UNICEF Palestine Chief of Communication and Advocacy (English)
drance@unicef.org
+972547787604

Mira Nasser
UNICEF Palestine Communications Specialist (Arabic)
minasser@unicef.org
+972 598568428

Bisma Akbar
WHO occupied Palestinian territory Communications Officer
akbarb@who.int
+972 54-717-8959

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