

*Hopes rise that disease outbreak has been contained*

**Amman, 24 October 2014** - As the world marks World Polio Day, UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and partners across the Middle East are bolstering efforts to contain a polio outbreak triggered by the conflict in Syria and Iraq last year.

In the coming weeks, 25 million children under the age of five, across seven countries, (Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and Iraq) will be vaccinated against polio, amid rising hopes the outbreak in the region has been contained.

The current synchronised vaccination rounds are part of a crucial multi-country effort to eliminate polio in the Middle East, after 36 cases were confirmed in Syria in October 2013, and two further cases were confirmed in Iraq in April 2014.

“Tremendous progress has been achieved since polio made its way back into Syria last year. Through the huge effort of our partners to reach children in hard- to-access areas, in challenging conditions, there have been no new cases of polio reported in Syria or Iraq since April,” said Maria Calivis, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa. “This effort must be sustained and we must remain vigilant so that all children can grow and thrive without the fear of polio.”

Ongoing activities include:

- In Syria: 2.9 million children targeted for immunization in October
- In Iraq: 5.8 million children targeted to be vaccinated in October
- In Lebanon: 550,000 children to be immunized in in October and November
- In Jordan: 1.1 million targeted to be vaccinated in October
- In Egypt: 15 million children targeted for immunization in October
- In Turkey: 300,000 children targeted to be vaccinated in October

In Syria and Iraq, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) partners are making a special

effort to reach children who have been displaced by the ongoing violence, and who may have missed out on previous vaccination campaigns because of heavy fighting. An estimated 200,000 children will not be reached through the polio campaign in Syria because they live in hard-to-reach areas affected by the ongoing conflict.

“While polio has been reduced by over 99 per cent since the global eradication effort started, the risk of further international spread across the region remains high, so we appeal to parents to give their full support to these campaigns, which will run through early 2015,” said Chris Maher, Manager of Polio Eradication and Emergency Response, WHO. “Closing the Middle East polio outbreak is a critical step toward improving the lives of the world’s most vulnerable children.”

GPEI is spearheaded by national governments, WHO, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and UNICEF, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Islamic Development Bank and a range of public and private sector donors. Since 1988, GPEI has reduced polio worldwide by over 99 percent.

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Friday 26th of April 2024 10:17:10 PM