Khartoum, 8 April 2019 – The Federal Ministry of Health in Sudan, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) today launched a large-scale vaccination campaign in Sudan to vaccinate over 11 million children aged 0 month to 10 years against measles and polio combined with vitamin A supplement from 8 April to 2 May 2019.

Official statistics in Sudan indicate that measles is the third cause of mortality among infants and the first among vaccine-preventable diseases. As of March 2019, 834 measles cases were reported compared to 4980 in 2018.
Although polio and measles immunization programmes are separate, they have come together this time to bring health security and achieve the desired health protection outcomes in Sudan. More than 38,826 highly skilled workforce of community vaccinators and frontline health workers and social mobilizers were mobilized to implement this massive campaign.

“The Federal Ministry of Health in Sudan alongside WHO, UNICEF, and other partners and stakeholders work proactively to protect all Sudanese against vaccine-preventable diseases through regular vaccination campaigns,” said His Excellency Dr Al-Saddig Mahjoub Al Faki Hashem, the Federal Minister of Health in Sudan. “Our joint efforts have made a significant difference in the measles-polio vaccination programme across the country. All 18 states are covered with a total of 189 localities during this campaign,” he added.

“This mass immunization campaign is a critical activity in Sudan’s ongoing work to protect all population against vaccine-preventable diseases,” said Dr Naeema Al Gasseer, WHO Representative in Sudan. “Achieving strong immunization coverage is essential for protecting children against fatal but preventable diseases like polio and measles. We will continue our endeavour to reach this goal and maintaining polio and measles free Sudan,” she added.

The possibility that a child will become ill and die from measles is extremely high. “Against the backdrop of the outbreak of measles at a global level, and the large number of vulnerable children who don’t have easy access to healthcare facilities, the threat for Sudan from this highly contagious and potentially deadly disease is very real,” said Abdullah Fadil, UNICEF Country Representative. “And that’s why this campaign at this time is especially crucial in saving lives and preventing that threat.”

Although Sudan reported no polio case during the last 10 years, high population immunity is still essential in the event of possible importation of the wild poliovirus (WPV) or vaccine-derived poliovirus (VDPV)s after the appearance of the most recent case of circulating cVDPV in Nigeria in Feb 2019.

However, the risk of importation among the population of South Kordofan and Blue Nile States remains high due to the decline in immunity resulting from the insecurity and conflict conditions in these areas.
To respond to polio and measles potential risks in Sudan, the local health authorities have recognized the importance of sustainable immunization campaigns as supplementary strategies to boost the immunity of target population and contain the impact of the disease on the morbidity and mortality rates in the country.

The technical support from WHO and UNICEF alongside the financial contribution of GAVI have assisted the health authorities of Sudan to maintain the regular immunization programme all over the country and avoid the devastating implications of potential public health emergencies on the population, the local economy, and the regional and global health security and well-being.

This joint polio/measles campaign is the first nationwide polio immunization activity since 2014. It also marked a decrease in the OPV operational cost per child from US$ 0.61 to US$ 0.11, the lowest ever cost recorded by the country’s immunization programme.

For more information, pls contact:

Ajyal Sultany
WHO Communications Officer
sultanya@who.int

Salma Ismail
UNICEF Communications Officer
saismail@unicef.org