



MOGADISHU, 24 November 2019 - Health authorities launched today a campaign to vaccinate 1.7 million children against measles and polio in Benaadir, Galguduud, Hirshabelle, Jubaland and South West State, Somalia.

The 5-day campaign, running from 24 to 28 November, will target children under the age of 5 with polio vaccines and children aged 6 to 59 months with measles vaccines. The vaccination campaign, conducted in partnership with the Somali government, World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), also includes a vitamin A supplement for children under 5 to boost their immunity as well as de-worming tablets.

The measles virus is spread by respiratory transmission and is highly contagious. Up to 90% of people without immunity who are sharing a house with an infected person will catch it. As of 9 November, 3616 suspected measles cases have been reported in Somalia in 2019.

Somalia also continues to respond to a vaccine-derived polio outbreak. Three vaccine-derived polio cases have been confirmed in the country in 2019 and 15 children have been paralysed since the onset of the latest outbreak in 2017.

“One among 7 Somali children dies before their fifth birthday and many of these deaths are preventable by use of vaccines. Although we have made progress over the years to improve routine immunization coverage in the country, there is an urgent need to further scale up the vaccination coverage, especially for measles and polio, by working together with partners, communities and grass-root level organizations. The integrated campaign for measles and polio is expected to improve routine immunization coverage and reach out to those who are missed out during routine immunization programme,” said WHO Representative Dr Mamunur Malik.

The campaign targets particularly children in districts with high concentrations of internally displaced persons and nomadic communities. These population groups often have higher

mobility, and so are at increased risk for transmission of these diseases.

“Crowded living conditions, malnutrition and limited access to water and sanitation in the camps and other sites breed disease and put children at grave risk,” said UNICEF Somalia Representative Werner Schultink. “To protect these children, it is critical to reach them with life-saving vaccines.”

The campaign aims to stem the transmission of measles infection and reduce the likelihood of future measles outbreaks in Somalia. Adding polio vaccine to the campaign will also help to bolster protection against polio virus type 1 and 3 among all Somali children.

More than 17 000 skilled community vaccinators, frontline health workers and social mobilizers are implementing the campaign.

Integrated campaigns are important to raise immunity among children and avoid the devastating implications of these entirely preventable diseases on individuals, families, the local economy and health security in the region.

### **About WHO**

The World Health Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations whose vision is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.

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### **About UNICEF**

UNICEF works in some of the world’s toughest places, to reach the world’s most disadvantaged children. Across 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone. Follow UNICEF Somalia on Twitter and Facebook.

### **About GPEI**

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative is a public-private partnership led by national governments and spearheaded by the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, working towards a future where no child will ever again be paralysed by polio.

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