WHO EMRO | UNICEF and WHO support national immunization campaign in Syria amid COVID-19 pandemic

More than 210,000 children under the age of 5 across Syria catch up on their vaccines

Damascus, 29 June 2020 – With an aim to maintain vital routine immunization services amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a national immunization campaign supported by WHO and UNICEF has concluded across Syria. During the 5-day campaign, implemented by the Syrian Ministry of Health, health workers checked the vaccination status of more than 900,000 children and vaccinated more than 210,100 children to ensure they are caught up with the routine immunization schedule.

Over 1000 health centres, 545 mobile teams, 666 temporary vaccination posts and more than 8000 health workers were mobilized for the campaign. In-line with WHO global guidelines,
health workers were trained on preventative and precautionary measures, including disinfection, hygiene protocols and overcrowding prevention. In addition, they were provided with personal protection equipment for their safety and that of children and caregivers during the immunization campaign.

“No child should miss out on their vaccinations, now more than ever” says Fran Equiza, UNICEF Representative in Syria, “These are difficult times, parents may feel overwhelmed with worries. Our message to them is clear: make sure your kids receive their routine immunizations to avoid vaccine-preventable diseases. When vaccination coverage goes down, more outbreaks will occur, including of life-threatening diseases like measles and polio.”

According to WHO, there has been about a 5% reduction in vaccination coverage in the first half of 2020. This has occurred mainly as a result of challenges inflicted by the COVID-19
pandemic, including limited access to health centres due to movement restrictions, as well as fear of contracting the virus. WHO continuously asserts its commitment to provide support to save the lives of children and protect them against poor health outcomes, including the threat of vaccine-preventable diseases.

“I would like to thank health professionals for supporting such a significant programme at such critical time. I would like to recognize the enormous competency health vaccinators have exhibited during this mission; and their commitment to protect children in Syria against vaccine preventable diseases and provide them with immunization to enjoy a disease-free childhood. These days, more than ever, the health of all depends on the courage and dedication of frontline heroes. Our deepest gratitude goes to the public health workforce,” said Dr Akjemal Magtymova, WHO Representative in Syria.

WHO and UNICEF noted in a joint health brief published this month that health care disruptions due to COVID-19 could have a devastating impact on child mortality in the Middle East and North Africa. The full and safe resumption of immunization campaigns as well as nutrition services, while following strict precautionary measures for infection prevention, are key to helping tens of thousands of children reach their fifth year of age in good health.

Photos of the campaign can be found here and here

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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 more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

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About WHO

Under its vision of Universal Health Coverage and the right to health care for all people, everywhere, WHO works worldwide to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable. Its goal is to ensure that a billion more people have universal health coverage, to protect a billion more people from health emergencies, and provide a further billion people with better health and well-being.

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