19 May 2015 – Vaccinating children against life-threatening diseases during conflict can be a daunting task. Over the past few weeks, vaccinators and volunteers in Yemen have persevered to ensure the continuation of immunization activities in some of the most crisis-affected areas of Yemen. Their work has been challenged by insecurity, roadblocks, fuel shortages and power outages.

Mohammed Khaled, one of the supervisors of the immunization programme in Al-Zohra district of Hodeida, said that vaccinators have to walk for long distances to remote areas in extremely hot weather conditions due to lack of transportation caused by fuel shortages. “By the time they reach their destination, vaccinators are covered in sand from head to toe. One female vaccinator was treated for sunstroke,” he said.

Despite these challenging conditions, vaccinators have been able to successfully reach internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities and immunize children against polio, measles and rubella, as well as provide them with vitamin A supplementation. These vaccinations were implemented in Sana’a City, Al Hodaida, Hajja, Shabwa, Abyan, Lahj and Aden. Unfortunately, due to the insecurity, total figures of children vaccinated have not been yet obtained from the field.

“Due to the insecurity, parents are reluctant to take their children out to health facilities to be immunized. This makes it even more critical that we expand our outreach activities, and make sure that we reach as many children as possible,” said Dr Ahmed Shadoul, WHO Representative for Yemen. “WHO is committed to continuing its utmost support to save lives of Yemeni children, especially in affected areas. Yemen has been polio free since 2006 and we want to make sure that every child continues to be protected against this disfiguring disease,” he added.

WHO, together with Yemen’s Ministry of Health and health partners, has scaled-up its support to immunization programmes by providing fuel needed for generators to maintain the vaccine cold chain, and making regular visits with officials from the Expanded Programme on Immunization to national vaccine stores to ensure that vaccines are safe and the cold chain is functioning.

Photo gallery
WHO has provided immunization services to hundreds of displaced children.

WHO has been making regular visits to the national vaccine stores to ensure that vaccines are safe and effective.

A displaced mother in Sana’a makes sure her newborn child is vaccinated.
WHO supports the operational costs of the Expanded Programme on Immunization at the central and governorate level and provides fuel for vaccination teams and transportation of vaccines.

A nurse from Al Sabeen Hospital in Sana’a, a major hospital supported by WHO, vaccinates children.
Violence in Shabwa governorate has not prevented people from bringing their children to health facilities for vaccinations.

Due to damage to health facilities in Sa'ada governorate mobile vaccination teams have conducted immunization services for internally displaced children and children in the host community.
Over the last few weeks children under 2 years have been vaccinated against all childhood fatal diseases.

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