

KHARTOUM, 28 December 2022 – Tomorrow the Federal Ministry of Health in Sudan, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) will launch a catch-up vaccination campaign to vaccinate children against polio and yellow fever from 29 December 2022 to 3 January 2023.

This campaign will cover the Darfur states as well as Sennar state in efforts to increase vaccination coverage and further vaccine equity in all parts of Sudan by reaching out to cover the birth cohort who missed their routine polio IPV vaccine. For this reason, the main target of this campaign will be children between 5 and 7.5 years of age.

The catch-up campaign was in the making for many months; however, it also comes after the confirmation of a variant type 2 poliovirus (cVDPV2) in a young boy aged 4 years of age in Kereinik locality of West Darfur, Sudan on 16 December 2022.

“This campaign comes at a crucial time as Sudan prepares to strengthen immunity against the recently declared outbreak of poliovirus. I urge parents and caregivers to ensure that children receive vaccination in this subnational round which boosts immunity against paralysis. The teams are also assessing the scope and timing of further vaccination rounds. Together, we closed a polio outbreak before – a testament to the dedication and skill of Sudan’s health workers and the leadership of its Federal Ministry of Health – and we can do it again,” said Dr Nima Saeed Abid, the WHO Representative in Sudan.

Last week, the partners worked on a mechanism to activate the polio outbreak preparedness and response plan, which includes strengthening routine immunization, enhancing surveillance systems and preparing for a nationwide polio campaign that is planned to take place in the upcoming weeks after environmental sampling returned a positive result, which suggests active community spread.

In August 2022, Sudan successfully closed the 2020 poliovirus outbreak that affected 58 children in 15 out of 18 states. Backed by UNICEF and WHO, the Federal Ministry of Health successfully organized 2 nationwide vaccination campaigns targeting children under 5 years of age to contain the spread of poliovirus, reaching over 95% of the target population. Community engagement and social mobilization efforts were stepped up to ensure information about the dangers of the disease and the need to immunize every eligible child reached every household.

The country also vaccinated children for the first time during a campaign in the Ullu area of Blue Nile and Jabal Marah, and improved surveillance for acute flaccid paralysis by expansion of environmental surveillance to 14 additional sites in 6 states.

Immunization saves lives. It protects children and their communities and protects future generations by eradicating diseases.

“Polio is a highly infectious and incurable disease that mainly affects young children. It leads to paralysis and in some cases death. Immunization is the best way to protect children from this scourge, and we urge all parents to ensure their children receive the polio vaccine, and all other routine immunizations, so that they are protected. Any child who is not fully vaccinated is vulnerable to polio, and UNICEF will support partners and communities to reach all children with life-saving vaccines,” said Mandeep O’Brien, UNICEF’s representative in Sudan.

Sudan’s last reported polio case (a case of wild poliovirus) was in March 2009 and the country was declared polio-free in 2015 by WHO. However, it has been considered at high risk for importation of polioviruses for several years due to a decline in population immunity.

The campaign launched today follows efforts to secure sufficient vaccines, ensure the necessary cold chain facilities as well as district level microplanning and provide refresher training for vaccinators so that the services delivered are of high quality. UNICEF and WHO support immunization programmes and will continue to ensure that no child is left behind.

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## About UNICEF Sudan

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 Sudan

The World Health Organization in Sudan works in close collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Health and partners to support the country in reaching its national health development goals and to ensure that all health efforts are coordinated.

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