

MEDIA RELEASE

Despite insecurity, UNICEF measles campaign in Somalia reaches over 142,000

Nairobi, Kenya 18 September 2008 – 142,654 children between the ages of nine months and 15 years were vaccinated against measles in the latest campaign carried out in Mogadishu and Afgoye Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Central Somalia between 27 August and 4 September 2008, UNICEF announced today.

“Carried out in a complex situation with a mix of recent heavy rainfall and insecurity, the vaccination teams had to overcome insurmountable odds in some locations,” said UNICEF Somalia Representative, Christian Balslev-Olesen. “Notwithstanding the threat posed by measles, security conditions continue to deteriorate particularly in the parts of Somalia especially among internally displaced persons. Additionally there are alarmingly high malnutrition rates in the country. A major challenge was accessing the IDPs who largely due to the conflict and civil insecurity in Mogadishu have been dispersed along the Mogadishu- Afgoye stretch of road.”

Measles is an important public health problem in Somalia and while there is scarcity of information on the overall burden of measles, limited data indicates that it is an important cause of childhood death. Somalia has one of the highest infant and under five mortality rates in the world at 86 per 1000 children and 135 per 1000 live births respectively. Routine measles vaccination coverage is only about 19 per cent for the whole country.

The campaign was implemented by a local NGO, Jumbo Peace and Development Organization, in collaboration with local communities and targeted about 95% of the total young population in the areas covered. 105 vaccination teams undertook the exercise through 85 fixed locations and 20 mobile set-ups in Deynile, Kah Shiqaal, and Mogadishu North IDP camps in Mogadishu as well as the IDP camps along the Afgoye corridor in Central Somalia.

This latest measles campaign is a follow-up of the national campaign in 2007 that reached 450,000 children aged nine months to 15 years. This earlier campaign resulted in measles cases plummeting from 3,836 during the first half of 2006 to 564 cases during the same period in 2007 with only seven deaths reported for the first half of 2007.

“With the increase in number of IDPs in Mogadishu and Afgoye, this campaign is providing essential protection against one of the most rampant communicable diseases. High population density, poor nutrition and overall health can lead to measles outbreaks that kill many children,” said Unni Silkoset, UNICEF Somalia Health Specialist. “UNICEF and its collaborating partners continue efforts to reduce its incidence through routine immunization, campaigns and management of cases while new approaches for reaching more children with comprehensive interventions are under planning.”

Measles infection occurs through spread of nasal and oral fluids with the first symptoms after an incubation period of seven to 14 days being fever, nasal discharge, and redness

of the eyes. Measles is also a contributing factor to malnutrition and malnutrition likewise increases the risk of getting measles.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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