

PRESS RELEASE

UNICEF supports anti-measles campaign for children in Vavuniya camps

Vavuniya 2 August 2009 - More than 36,000 internally displaced children in camps will be vaccinated against measles in a special 'child health campaign' launched this week. In a joint effort with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF, WHO and a coalition of other partners the campaign aims to counter the sporadic cases of measles which have occurred in the past months and prevent risk of further outbreak.

The campaign will target all children under 5 years. Nearly 100 public health midwives and 1200 volunteers will participate at 30 centres in Vavuniya. This follows several weeks of preparations to pre-position immunization supplies, train health workers and mobilize volunteers.

'Child health remains a key priority for the Government of Sri Lanka, we are committed to ensuring that the IDP population is protected' said Secretary to the Ministry of Health, Dr Athula Kahandaliyanage.

Speaking today at a special measles training for health workers, the Deputy Director of Health Services, Dr. Ajith Mendis, thanked all of those involved in the campaign, particularly UNICEF, and urged all parents in camps to have their children vaccinated at the nearest centre.

Together with immunization against measles, children will be given a dose of vitamin A and de-worming tablets – two additional life saving interventions aimed at raising a child's resistance against many diseases and preventing malnutrition, while freeing them from worms. Children will also be given the polio vaccine.

'Children under five are the most vulnerable part of a population especially in emergencies; this campaign will help save lives' said Desiree Jongsma, Acting UNICEF Country Representative. She commended the joint efforts by the Ministry of Health Care and Nutrition, the Epidemiology Unit and all partners on this important initiative.

The measles campaign is being implemented with the generous contribution of DFID.

Globally measles remains one of the major causes of childhood illness and a leading cause of child deaths especially in countries undergoing or recovering from emergencies. Immunization activities, together with vitamin A supplementation, are the most effective means of reducing mortality during and after complex emergencies.

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