Largest Measles-Rubella Vaccination Campaign Underway in Bangladesh

Dhaka, Saturday, 25 January 2014: For the first time Bangladesh launches its largest ever measles-rubella (MR) vaccination campaign aiming to reach 52 million children aged nine months to under 15 years to protect them against these infectious diseases.

Organized by the Government of Bangladesh, this campaign is one of the biggest public health mobilization efforts in the country, engaging thousands of vaccinators and volunteers. The campaign, starting today will cover more than 170,000 schools and 150,000 immunization centres over a three week period (ending 13 February 2014) with a special attention on children living on the streets and other high-risk populations.

“Immunization plays a critical role in reducing infant and child mortality and morbidity. Given the commitment and determination shown by the Government and partners, we are confident that this momentous effort will make a significant and sustained contribution to child survival in Bangladesh. To make this MR campaign a success full access to children must be protected and preserved so that the heroes of this work can make history by keeping these diseases away from the children of Bangladesh,” says UNICEF Bangladesh Representative, Pascal Villeneuve.

WHO Representative to Bangladesh Dr Thushara Fernando says, "Last month more than 20 million children have been vaccinated during the polio National Immunization Days. With strong coordination among various government ministries and departments, I am confident that the involvement of civil society organizations as well as advocacy from religious leaders; the targeted 52 million children would be vaccinated against measles, rubella and polio in schools and in other vaccination centres in next three weeks.” He adds, “The determined effort of all health managers, health personnel and community volunteers would guarantee safety and the success of this public health activity”.

“This is the largest ever measles-rubella campaign launched to date with support from the GAVI Alliance,” says Dr Seth Berkley, GAVI Alliance CEO. “Investing in rubella will provide a much-needed boost to improving women’s and children’s health and will help accelerate global progress in controlling two life-threatening diseases. GAVI plans to support 49 countries to introduce the combined measles-rubella vaccine by 2020”.

Plans are underway to vaccinate children living on the streets and other high-risk populations in urban areas who may not attend school or go to community vaccination sites. In the urban areas, teams have been assigned to cover railway stations, bus stations, river and sea terminals, parks and even footpaths. Special teams have also been mobilized to cover hard-to-reach areas such as haor (surrounded by water) and char (small islands) areas, large market places, rice mills, brick fields, brothels and places where working mothers live with their children.

Routine measles vaccination coverage has reached 86 per cent of children aged under one year in Bangladesh. This means that around one million children under one year remain susceptible to measles each year as they are left out or unable to develop immunity. Although in 2012, Bangladesh introduced measles second
dose vaccine for children aged 15 months, older children still remained susceptible to the disease. These children need a second chance for survival.

If a woman is infected with rubella, particularly before conception and during the first three months of pregnancy, there is 90 per cent chance of her passing the infection on to her unborn child resulting in miscarriage, death, or congenital defects.

The MR campaign marks the end of several months of careful planning by the national immunization programme under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Thousands of field managers, frontline health workers and volunteers have joined forces to ensure that no child is left behind. The MR vaccination campaign is a joint effort by the Government of Bangladesh, GAVI Alliance, UNICEF, WHO and other development partners.

The campaign is also one of several health drives that are being rolled-out to prevent an additional 108,000 child deaths annually and bring down preventable child deaths to 20 per 1,000 live births by 2035, ’Bangladesh Call to Action’ - under the global initiative of, ‘Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed’ - to give every child the best possible start in life.

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About UNICEF: UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: www.unicef.org/bd

About WHO: World Health Organization (WHO) is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries, and monitoring and assessing health trends. Its overall Objective is the attainment of the highest possible level of health for all people. For more information about WHO and its Bangladesh country office please visit: www.searo.who.int/bangladesh/

About GAVI: The GAVI Alliance is a public-private partnership committed to saving children’s lives and protecting people’s health by increasing access to immunisation in poor countries. The Alliance brings together developing country and donor governments, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank, the vaccine industry, technical agencies, civil society, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other private sector partners. GAVI uses innovative finance mechanisms, including co-financing by recipient countries, to secure sustainable
funding and adequate supply of quality vaccines. Since 2000, GAVI has contributed to the immunisation of an additional 440 million children and the prevention of approximately 6 million future deaths. Learn more at www.gavi.org and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.

GAVI is funded by governments [Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States], the European Commission, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as private and corporate partners [Absolute Return for Kids, Anglo American plc., The Children’s Investment Fund Foundation, Comic Relief, Dutch Postcode Lottery, His Highness Sheikh Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, JP Morgan, “la Caixa” Foundation, LDS Charities, Lions Clubs, OPEC and Vodafone].

\(^1\) Bangladesh EPI Coverage Evaluation Survey 2013