National Immunization Campaign launched in Timor-Leste to protect 500,000 children against Measles, Rubella and Polio

H.E. Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, Dr Rui Maria de Araújo and H.E. Minister of Health, Dr Maria do Céu Sarmento Pina da Costa launched a National Measles, Rubella and Polio Immunization Campaign on July 13th 2015 in Hera Primary School, Dili. The immunization campaign, supported by the Measles & Rubella Initiative, WHO, UNICEF and global immunization partners, aims to reach 500,000 children aged between 0 months and less than 15 years or 40 per cent of the national population. Ministers, Representatives of UN Agencies, development partners and other dignitaries attended the campaign launch displaying strong support for the national immunization campaign.

Vaccines have played a pivotal role in improving child health throughout the world, preventing 2 to 3 million infant deaths globally each year. The Government of Timor-Leste has committed to achieving over 90 per cent immunization coverage throughout the country. However, 20-30 per cent of children miss out on basic vaccines each year, leading to an accumulation of unimmunized children and recurrent outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases. The National Measles, Rubella and Polio Immunization Campaign aims to close the immunization gap, protect child health, and strengthen the routine immunization program for years to come.

During the launch ceremony, H.E. Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, Dr Rui Maria de Araújo encouraged all parents, community leaders and health care workers to support not only this campaign, but also the routine immunization program, because everyone must play an important role in order for Timor-Leste to reach over 90 per cent immunization coverage nationwide. “Parents should bring their children for vaccination, but if they don’t bring their children for vaccination, health care workers should go and look for the families and bring them to the health centre for vaccination. Community leaders also have a very important role in mobilizing the community and encouraging all parents to bring their children for vaccination,” highlighted H.E. Dr Rui Maria de Araújo.
This immunization campaign is part of a global campaign movement. The Measles & Rubella Initiative, supported by American Red Cross, CDC, UNICEF, United Nations Foundation and WHO, has been mobilizing resources and strengthening partnerships for Measles and Rubella elimination globally. To make this campaign a success in Timor-Leste, WHO, UNICEF and global immunization partners were able to pool technical, logistical and financial support to Timor-Leste for supplies, social mobilization and advocacy materials, training and capacity building.

This support includes providing vaccines, refrigerators, cold chain, installation of cold chain and refrigerators in every health facilities in all 13 districts, training for health care workers, social mobilization and the launch of a multi media campaign. This will greatly enhance the capacity of the Government of Timor-Leste to implement the routine immunization program scheduled, reducing preventable sickness and help build a strong healthy nation for the future. In addition to WHO and UNICEF, many additional partners will provide support to the Ministry of Health during the implementation of the campaign including IFRC, CVTL, DFAT, HAI and USAID-HADIAK.

WHO and UNICEF will continue providing support to strengthen the Ministry of Health’s immunization program in order to scale up Measles-Rubella Immunization coverage and pave the way for Measles and Rubella elimination. In Timor-Leste, vaccines have already successfully eliminated smallpox, polio and maternal and neonatal tetanus. Dr Rajesh Pandav, WHO Representative, expressed his hope that this success will be extended to include measles and rubella in future. “The launch of this immunization campaign will be a very important step forward in this direction,” highlighted Dr Pandav.