

Press release

Mass measles vaccination campaign underway in southern Somalia

Kismayo, Lower Juba, Somalia 16 December 2016 - UNICEF and partners are aiming to vaccinate 54,000 children under 10 in Kismayo, southern Somalia following a serious outbreak of measles.

There have been over 704 cases of fever and rashes in Kismayo, the majority of them children. Many of the children, suspected to be suffering from measles, are sleeping on the floor of Kismayo General Hospital. Most were not vaccinated against measles although there are 16 free vaccination posts in Kismayo.

UNICEF supported the swift delivery of 55,000 doses of measles vaccine to Kismayo along with Vitamin A supplementation to boost immunity. The vaccines are funded by the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and Japan.

Earlier this month, UNICEF provided Kismayo General Hospital with essential medicines and other lifesaving health supplies for the clinical management of measles cases, as well as three freezers for the cold chain storage for vaccines, funded by several donors including the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), Finland, Japan, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

"Measles is one of the most deadly vaccine-preventable diseases but sadly it is far from being the only one in Somalia," said Jeremy Hopkins, UNICEF Somalia's Representative a.i.. "We are most grateful to our donors, but we need increased support to ensure we have nationwide immunisation coverage and engagement with local communities to ensure every child is fully vaccinated."

Measles is a key indicator of the strength of a country's immunisation systems and Somalia has one of the lowest immunization rates in the world. It is a highly contagious viral disease and a leading cause of death among young children in Somalia. It can lead to pneumonia, diarrhoea and encephalitis which causes brain swelling and blindness and attacks those with weak immunity resulting from malnutrition, Vitamin A deficiency and unhygienic living conditions. It can be prevented with two doses of a safe and effective vaccine.

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, is funding the cold chain and awareness creation activities, as well as the newly introduced vaccine against polio (IPV) and the Pentavalent vaccine which covers childhood TB, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B and Haemophilus influenza type b (Hib).

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