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Papua New Guinea vaccinates almost 300,000 on first round of polio campaign *Children in 9 provinces to be reached in August; nationwide in September and October*

9 August 2018, PORT MORESBY – Almost 300 000 children under the age of 5 in Morobe, Madang and Eastern Highlands Provinces were vaccinated in the first round of the polio campaign in Papua New Guinea.

This is the first of four rounds of supplementary immunization activities in response to the current outbreak of poliovirus in Papua New Guinea after 18 years of being polio-free. The first round was held from 16 July to 3 August and additional rounds are planned in late August, September and October.

“I am very pleased that we have been able to protect almost 300 000 children from polio,” said Sir Dr Puka Temu, Minister for Health & HIV/AIDS of Papua New Guinea. “There was a high turnout in areas where there are significant numbers of mobile populations, which suggests that parents from other provinces brought their children for vaccination.”

To date, 299 683 children have been vaccinated, of which 126 312 were in Morobe; 94 890 in Eastern Highlands; and 78 481 in Madang. “In some hard-to-reach districts, mop up activities still continue”, according to Pascoe Kase, Secretary of the National Department of Health. “We have teams on the ground who go back to the communities and double checking to ensure that no child was missed.”

“The result of the first round of the campaign is a testament to the dedication of the more than 2900 outbreak responders, health workers, community volunteers and local authorities who were mobilized for the campaign,” said Dr Luo Dapeng, WHO Representative in Papua New Guinea. “I know many of you worked long hours, crossed rivers, navigated mountains and flew in choppers to reach every child and protect them from polio, and I thank you for that commitment.”

In support of the Government, WHO has established four emergency operations centres to manage day-to-day response operations and deployed 17 international experts on outbreak management, epidemiology, surveillance, immunization, data management, risk communication, logistics, administration, finance and coordination.

To ensure every possible case of polio is detected, WHO trained more than 200 Government staff on enhanced surveillance, especially in high-risk provinces of Chimbu, Eastern Highlands, Jiwaka, Madang, Morobe, Western Highlands and the National Capital District. The surveillance officers detect suspected cases, conduct investigation and collect samples for laboratory testing. To date, 55 suspected cases are being investigated.

WHO also worked with NDOH and UNICEF, provincial health authorities and partners in implementing the communication plan for the polio outbreak response, including partnership with the radio and TV network of the National Broadcasting Corporation.

“The first round of polio campaign has achieved impressive results and I congratulate the Government for their leadership and commitment and join WHO to thank the health workers, community volunteers and local authorities for their commitment and dedication to protect the children from polio,” said UNICEF Representative, David Mcloughlin. “I also want to thank the families giving this due importance to ensure their children were vaccinated.”

To support the Government, UNICEF procured and distributed 611,000 doses of oral polio vaccines in July for use in the first round of polio campaign in Morobe, Madang and Eastern Highlands Provinces. Additional one million doses were brought this week for the second, third and fourth rounds. To ensure proper storage and handling of vaccines to remain effective, UNICEF also provided technical support to repair faulty vaccine refrigerators in the three provinces and also installed eight new refrigerators in Madang.

In collaboration with NDOH and WHO, UNICEF also supported a social mobilisation drive to engage and motivate a range of partners, stakeholders and communities to raise awareness of the need for children to be vaccinated.

Polio Vaccination Campaign in August Expands to Nine Provinces; goes nationwide in September and October

Following the confirmation of the third case of polio in Enga Province, the National Emergency Operations Centre for the Polio Outbreak Response today announced that the second round of the vaccination campaign will cover 9 provinces: Morobe, Madang, Eastern Highlands, Enga, Chimbu, Southern Highlands, Western Highlands, Jiwaka and Hela.

Morobe, Madang and Eastern Highlands provinces will have their second round of vaccination from 20 August until 2 September 2018.

The provinces of Enga, Chimbu, Southern Highlands, Western Highlands, Jiwaka and Hela will have their first round of vaccination from 27 August until 9 September.

“In the next round of the campaign, we’re aiming to reach more than 700 000 children under 5 years old in the 9 provinces to ensure they’re protected from polio,” said Pascoe Kase. WHO and UNICEF are mobilizing additional human resources and logistics to support the Government in the next rounds of the campaign, including the purchase of additional vaccines.

A nationwide polio vaccination campaign is now planned for September and October targeting **1 265 000** children under 5 years old.

The polio vaccination campaign in Papua New Guinea is organized by the National Department of Health (NDOH) and the Provincial Health Authorities, with support from the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, Rotary International and the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). The GPEI is spearheaded by national governments, WHO, Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF.

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