



## JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

### **A new step in fighting polio virus Afghanistan is the first country to use a new vaccine during Sub-National Immunization Campaign Dec 15-17, 2009.**

*“One single shot of vaccine to protect children from two strains of Polio”*

**Kabul 14 December 2009** – Afghanistan is the first country ever, to use bivalent oral polio vaccine during the Sub National Immunization Campaign, 15 – 17, December 2009, targeting a total of 2.8 million Children less than 5 years of age in the South, Southeast and Eastern regions and Farah province (Western Region) of the country. Four million doses of bivalent vaccine are being procured by UNICEF with the financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

The use of bivalent Oral Polio vaccine (bOPV) in house to house mass vaccination campaigns constitutes an important and powerful tool to achieve the target of Polio eradication globally. The new vaccine is much more effective than the trivalent Oral Polio Vaccine which is currently being used by the program.

“Use of bivalent OPV will certainly add a new dimension to our Polio eradication efforts in effectively eradicating P1 and P3 virus strains, which are circulating in Afghanistan, and will complement the use of trivalent OPV and monovalent OPV” said representatives of WHO and UNICEF.

In Afghanistan, the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) management team, which is led by the Afghan Ministry of Public Health with the partnership of UNICEF and WHO, agreed to use the new vaccine in the four National and eight sub-national immunization campaigns (NID/SNID) planned for 2010.

In areas like Afghanistan, where the wild polio virus types 1 and 3 co-exist, bivalent OPV will accelerate the interruption of both serotypes simultaneously. The introduction of this new vaccine will allow the managers to rationalize the number of Polio Campaigns, while concentrating on campaign quality to ensure high levels of vaccination coverage among the communities and reach every single child under five years.

To ensure that all children under five years old in the selected districts are reached, 21,000 health workers will go from house to house in 14 provinces. As many families are unable to access health facilities in the rural parts of Afghanistan this approach is essential to ensure that every child in the target group is reached. In parallel a massive social mobilisation campaign is being conducted to orient and motivate parents in the target communities about the immunization drive.

Six rounds of nation-wide house to house vaccination campaign, targeting almost 7.5 million children, have been implemented in 2009. In addition four rounds of sub-national campaigns were conducted for South, Southeast and Eastern regions and Farah province (western region) to stop and prevent the virus from spreading to other parts of the country. As of December 1, 2009 Afghanistan has reported 31 confirmed cases of Poliomyelitis, mostly concentrated in the southern region.

The ever deteriorating security situation is limiting access to many children in conflict-ridden areas. Over 100,000 children could consistently not be reached by the vaccination teams during the last several campaigns. With continued population movements from polio endemic areas to polio free areas and vice-versa, the eradication of polio remains challenging. The new bivalent vaccine will be a vital tool in the fight against this crippling disease.

#### **For more information, please contact:**

UNICEF Kabul, Farida Ayari; [fayari@unicef.org](mailto:fayari@unicef.org); +93 (0) 798 50 7110

WHO Kabul, Dr Arshad Quddus, [quddusa@afg.emro.who.int](mailto:quddusa@afg.emro.who.int) ; +93 (0) 700 252 650

Ministry of Public Health, Dr Ahmad Farid Raaid, +93(0) 799 00 27 93