

Unicef in Lebanon and Immunization Campaigns



Background

Immunization is the most successful and cost-effective public health investment and is the cornerstone for reducing the childhood morbidity and mortality from vaccine preventable diseases. In Lebanon, the on-going Syrian conflict has posed challenges to the access, coverage and provision of quality immunization services in the country. The impact of the crisis has not only led 1.2 million Syrian children vulnerable, including the poor and marginalized children from the Lebanese and Palestinian community, but also has increased their needs and demand for the routine immunization across the country. Although the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) is providing free vaccines, until 2015, there was a registration charge and a consultation fee attached to each vaccination and this was identified as a potential barrier to the refugee families to have their children vaccinated in the MoPH affiliated Primary Health Care Centres (PHCCs) or dispensaries.

In Lebanon more than 60% of the vaccination is being provided by the private health sector, but the vast majority of the poor refugees are unable to afford the cost of vaccination from private physicians. Because of limited resources of the public sector and inability of the people-in-crisis to afford vaccination from the private sectors, a significant proportion of these needs may remain unmet. As a result, it is likely that a substantial number of children may have either missed or had their routine vaccinations schedules interrupted. Isolated outbreaks of communicable diseases like mumps, measles, hepatitis A and typhoid have been reported in different parts of the country. In addition, the polio outbreaks in Syria and Iraq in 2013 and 2014 have put Lebanon at risk of reintroduction of the wild polio virus owing to huge and frequent population movements to and from those countries.

Routine immunization situation

In Lebanon, although the administrative coverage report shows that more than 80% of children are being reached with all vaccines in each caza (district), there is a dearth of evidenced-based data on vaccination coverage among the children in the country. A recent survey, Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) in Lebanon, revealed that the immunization coverage among the Syrian children is 57.4% for PENTA3, 54% for MMR and 59% for measles vaccine among children from 12-23 months old. In this survey, gender was not found as a significant barriers with regards to immunization. In May 2015, a small scale district level survey conducted by the MoPH and ICRC among 12 to 59 months old Syrian children reported an overall EPI coverage: 70.5% for PENTA3, 65.7% for MMR1, 31.5% MMR2 and only 32.9% fully vaccinated children which are not sufficient enough to reach a level for population herd immunity against the respective vaccine preventable diseases. Concerning the reasons for not completing or not vaccinating children, 39.1% of the respondents reported lack of information (knowledge about boosters, necessity to immunize, where

to get vaccines) as the primary reason for not completing the vaccination. In early 2016, MoPH has conducted a nationwide EPI Coverage Evaluation Survey and the report is expected to be available and distributed among the partners soon.

UNICEF support to routine vaccination in Lebanon

UNICEF Lebanon, in partnership with the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) and Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), is providing immunization services to the Lebanese, Palestinian and also to the Syrian children and women living in the informal settlements and collective shelters.

The Lebanese routine immunisation schedule includes: hepatitis B, polio (IPV and OPV), diphtheria, Haemophilus influenza type B, pertussis, tetanus, measles, mumps, and rubella. As part of new vaccine introduction by the MoPH, PCV-13 was added to the schedule this year. Additionally, BCG and 2 doses of tetanus toxoid vaccines are provided to the Syrian children and women of child-bearing age (15-49 years). To strengthen the routine immunization programme in Lebanon, UNICEF provided various support to the MoPH and MoSA including other partner organizations:

Building capacity among the national staff UNICEF arranged an Effective Vaccine Management (EVM) training for 985 participants including EPI staff from the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH); Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA); UNRWA and NGOs. In 2015, UNICEF conducted an assessment of the EPI services in 54 Social Development Centres of the Ministry of Social Affairs to provide better immunization support to these centres.

For system strengthening

UNICEF provided:

- o All types of vaccines and non-vaccines supplies to the Ministry, its partners including UNRWA
- o More than 300 solar fridges and 585 Sibir fridges to the health facilities under the MoPH, MoSA and NGOs and trained at least one of their staff on the basic usage and maintenance of the fridges
- o 26 new cold rooms (one per district), each 40 cubic metre, to the MoPH to enhance their storage capacity of the vaccines and other supplies.

- o The National Measles Laboratory (NLM) with a sequencer (analyser) for genotyping of the measles virus in addition to providing the special cold chain system which is linked to the sequencer using 5 fridges with temperature limit to – 200C and 5 fridges with temperature limit to – 860C.
- o Printed all types of immunization registration forms, log books and vaccination cards

Increase community awareness and create demand for and trust in immunization services and campaigns

UNICEF Lebanon arranged different social mobilization activities, developed and supplied different posters, leaflets and banners, supported different TV and radio spots, observed World Immunization Week etc. In 2015, UNICEF conducted 5 Focus Group Discussions with the Syrian Syrian beneficiaries with regards to the immunization to obtain their feedback and insight on the relevance, effectiveness, and regular updates on the performance of UNICEF supported programmes, as well as to inform UNICEF ad hoc surveys that assess specific aspects of the situation of children and women in Lebanon. This year, to increase the awareness and positive attitudes of the caregivers on the importance of childhood vaccination and to increase capacity of front line workers working, the Communication for Development (C4D) team of UNICEF has taken several initiatives including mapping and identification of the partners /stakeholders, rapid assessment, advocacy with the with the private sector, Journalists, government and community, capacity building etc.

UNICEF partner Beyond provide immunization and basic primary health care services to the under 5 Syrian children and 15-49 years old women in the informal settlements and collective shelters. Also they conduct different campaigns and provide vaccines at the UNHCR Registration Centres and border check points through their medical mobile units (MMUs) and immunization teams.

Accelerated routine immunization campaigns

In response to the outbreaks of measles and mumps, in 2013, MoPH Lebanon in partnership with UNICEF partner Beyond Association, conducted an accelerated multi-antigen campaigns with measles monovalent vaccine (along with OPV and Vitamin A supplements) which continued from January till July. Through this campaign, 700,000 children from 9 months to 18 years old were

vaccinated with one dose of measles vaccine; and 300,000 children under 5 years were reached with oral polio vaccine and Vitamin A. In July, August, and September 2014, targeted campaigns took place in 210 municipalities that were determined to be at highest risk because of low routine immunisation rates, economic vulnerability, and high refugee density. The campaigns targeted children under 5 with polio vaccination in addition to immunisation against nine other antigens (measles, rubella, mumps, diphtheria, tetanus, hepatitis B, BCG, pertussis, and haemophilus influenza B). Over 120,000 children in July, 115,000 in August, and 126,000 in September were reached during these summer immunisation campaigns that were supported by MOPH, UNICEF, WHO, and UNHCR NGO partners.

Polio programme in Lebanon

Polio immunisation remains a key priority in-country. Lebanon has remained polio-free despite outbreaks in Syria and Iraq. Nonetheless, the risk of importation remains as long as displaced populations remain mobile. As response to the outbreaks in Syria and Iraq, Lebanon conducted several national and sub-national polio campaigns in last three years: two in 2013, seven in 2014, two in 2015 and two in 2016 covering all of Lebanon. Girls and boys were vaccinated in schools, at Primary Health Care Centres, through mobile medical units (MMUs) in informal settlements and collective shelters, and in Palestinian camps. Vaccinations are continuing for new arrivals at UNHCR registration centres, at the border, at the airport,

and for any children found to be unvaccinated by the mobile medical teams.

Mandatory polio vaccination is provided to all children under 5 entering Lebanon from Syria at official border crossings. In September 2014 this initiative was expanded to include all age groups with mandatory polio vaccination being provided as an additional preventive measure against polio for those entering Lebanon from any polio-affected country.

UNICEF also sponsored Recreation Days in October and November 2014 to draw children and caregivers into areas of entertainment where vaccination against polio was being provided, in cooperation with various NGO partners including Rotary International.

Two subsequent targeted polio immunisation campaigns took place in 2015 for which UNICEF provided 1,000,000 vaccine doses to the MoPH. In these two sub-national campaigns, in March, 384,888 and in April 421,691 children were reached under 5 years old. Also in January and February 2016, two sub-national polio campaign took place in Lebanon targeting 150,522 children under 5 years old in areas with high dropout rates and low immunization coverage. In January round, 143,784 and in February round 149,363 children under 5 years old (almost 96% of the targeted children) were reached through oral polio vaccine.

National and Sub-national Polio Campaigns in Lebanon (2014 to 2016)			
Year	Round	Target children under 5 years	Number (%) reached
2014	July	154,953	120,863 (78%)
	August	150,126	120,000 (80%)
	September	156,953	136,549 (87%)
	October	570,468	516,967 (91%)
	November	580,514	556,814 (96%)
2015	March	180,000	384,888 (214 %)
	April	180,000	421,691 (234 %)
2016	January	150,522	143,784 (96%)
	February	156,372	149,363 (96%)

UNICEF Lebanon’s role in these campaigns includes:

- Microplanning templates, intra-campaign monitoring forms, informative pamphlets, banners, polio campaign cards, posters and brochures were developed and provided to UNICEF’s implementing partners (as well as to MoPH) for distribution in the targeted localities. These materials not only promoted the campaigns, but also increased public awareness on the importance of multiple polio vaccine doses as well as of the importance of routine immunisation. UNICEF also provided technical support in training the Ministry staff and developing various materials.
- UNICEF provided MOPH with the 1.5 million doses of the polio vaccine necessary for the first two campaigns of 2013, as well as 500 vaccine vial-carriers. UNICEF provided another 2 million doses of vaccines for the March and April 2014 campaigns and procured all vaccines for the July, August and September 2014 campaigns (in addition to conducting monitoring visits). These campaigns were made possible through the kind contributions of the following donors: Germany, The Netherlands, and the US State Department (BPRM).
- To cover the needs of the October and November 2014 as well as the 2015 campaigns, 1.2 million doses of polio vaccine were provided to MOPH by UNICEF through the

European Union (EU)-funded project, “Conflict Reduction through Improving Healthcare Service for the Vulnerable Population in Lebanon” (€20 million in total). This EU-funded project was implemented by UNHCR and UNICEF and ensured that children under 5 receive the polio vaccine free regardless of nationality or where they are receiving health care. This campaign was also heavily supported by an intensive national media campaign, made possible through the kind contribution of the US State Department (BPRM)

1 VASyR Survey, Lebanon, 2015

2 Middle Dreib EPI coverage survey, MoPH and ICRC, May 2015

