

Nearly half a million children being vaccinated against diphtheria in Cox's Bazar

15 January 2018 | News

WHO, UNICEF and other health partners are working with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to establish fixed locations for immunization in the Rohingya camps



As part of an intensified response to the current diphtheria outbreak, WHO, UNICEF and health sector partners are working with the Bangladesh Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to vaccinate more than 475,000 children in Rohingya refugee camps, temporary settlements and surrounding areas.

Nearly 150,000 children aged six weeks to seven years received pentavalent vaccine (that protects against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, haemophilus influenza type b and hepatitis B), and nearly 166,000 children aged 7 to 17 years were given tetanus and diphtheria (Td) vaccine, during a three-week vaccination campaign that ended on 31 December. Two more rounds of vaccination with a diphtheria-containing vaccine, at intervals of one month, are planned to fully protect the children in camps and surrounding areas.

Dr Bardan Jung Rana, WHO Representative to Bangladesh said, "All efforts are being made to stop further spread of diphtheria. The vaccination of children in the Rohingya camps and nearby areas demonstrates the health sector's commitment to protecting people, particularly children, against deadly diseases."

Edouard Beigbeder, UNICEF Country Representative said, "Children are particularly vulnerable to diphtheria. Volunteers are making door-to-door visits in the Rohingya settlements to ensure all children receive vaccination. The massive influx within a very short time has heavily affected basic services in the settlement areas. They have no choice but to live in a very congested environment, which is impacting their health and quality of life. We are making continued efforts to improve conditions of the camps. At the same time, diphtheria vaccination is vital to reducing the risk of further outbreak."

To limit the spread of diphtheria to communities living near the Rohingya camps and settlements, nearly 160,000 children in 499 schools of Teknaf and Ukhiya sub-districts are also being vaccinated. This initiative began on 1 January. Vaccination was initiated on a day when children attend school in large numbers to avail themselves of free books provided by the government at the start of the academic year.

WHO, UNICEF and other health partners are working with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to establish fixed locations for immunization in the Rohingya camps to continue to provide life-saving vaccines to children, in line with Bangladesh's childhood immunization programme.