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## UNICEF uses text messages to spread the word about polio in Zambia



A child receiving a polio vaccination

20 July 2009 – The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) will be sending text messages to millions of Zambian parents this week as part of a new initiative to harness modern technology in the fight to prevent polio.

UNICEF has joined forces with the Zambian Health Ministry and two mobile phone companies, ZAIN and MTN, to encourage parents to bring their children under the age of five to the nearest health-care centre for free polio vaccinations.

“It is about time that we used modern technology to ensure child health and this year is particularly important because of the polio prevention campaign,” said [UNICEF](#) Zambia Representative, Lotta Sylwander.

Ms. Sylwander also expressed gratitude to MTN and ZAIN for sending SMS texts informing millions of their subscribers of activities taking place during the prevention campaign against the crippling disease in 28 districts bordering Angola, Namibia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

“Your child can be healthier! Take your children under age five to the nearest health centre for free vaccinations from 20-25 July,” is the message Zambian mobile phone users will read, UNICEF said in a news release.

The campaign at the centre of Zambia’s Child Health Week activities is part of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, a partnership spearheaded by the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), Rotary International, the United States Center for Diseases Control and Prevention and UNICEF.

Polio is a highly infectious and incurable viral disease. Contracted through contaminated food, water and faeces, it attacks the nervous system and mainly affects children under five. One in 200 infections leads to irreversible paralysis, usually in the legs, and among those paralyzed, five to 10 per cent die when their respiratory muscles become immobilized.

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