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UN-backed anti-measles campaign reaches over 5 million Afghan children



Afghan health workers vaccinating children for measles and polio in District 5 of Kabul on 10 July 2012. Photo: UNAMA/Fardin Waezi

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A United Nations-supported government campaign to eradicate measles and polio has vaccinated over 5.6 million children in Afghanistan over the past two weeks, and organizers are stressing the need for more funds to complete the effort next month.

About 27,000 health workers and volunteers participated in the vaccinations that took place across 16 of the country's 34 provinces, according to a [news release](#) issued by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)).

More than 5.6 million children between the ages of nine months and 10 years were given one dose of measles vaccine, as well as anti-polio drops, as part of the campaign, which was implemented by the Afghan Ministry of Public Health.

The World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), one of the UN agencies that supported the campaign, said that more funds are need to cover the remaining 18 provinces during the next phase of the campaign, which is set to take place in September.

Afghanistan – based on routine immunization coverage and epidemiological surveillance – has to repeat measles campaigns every two to four years, according to WHO. The country started its first measles elimination drive in 2001 by conducting a nationwide immunization campaign, and two follow-up anti-measles campaigns were implemented in 2006 and 2009.

As part of global measles elimination campaign known as 'The Measles and Rubella Initiative,' Afghanistan has committed to eliminate measles by the end of 2015.

More than one billion children have received a measles vaccination as a result of the Initiative, which was launched in 2001 to support vaccination campaigns worldwide. Globally, routine immunization has increased from 72 per cent to 85 per cent, and measles deaths have decreased by 74 per cent between 2000 and 2010.

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