

**UNICEF (UN Children's Fund)  
Media Release**

**Post-tsunami immunization campaign to keep Samoa's children safe**

Apia, 21 October 2009. – The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) are giving full support to a Samoan Government nationwide measles and Vitamin A immunization campaign that aims to reach more than 32,000 children.

The six-week campaign starts on 26 October in the tsunami-affected districts of Lalomanu in the southeast and Poutasi in southern Samoa. It aims to immunize 32,374 children between the ages of six months and 4 years 11 months – the most at-risk group.

UNICEF is providing essential equipment for the campaign, including vaccines, Vitamin A, syringes, and safety boxes, as well as cold-chain equipment such as vaccine carriers and cool boxes that are vital to keep vials of vaccines at a constant temperature in the tropical heat. WHO is providing technical and logistical support.

The Samoan National Health Service is conducting the campaign in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and providing trained health professionals to administer vaccinations.

UNICEF Health and Nutrition Consultant, Philip Mann, says that emergencies such as the tsunami that hit Samoa on 29 September can compromise the health of children, rendering them very susceptible to disease.

“We know that countries recovering from a natural disaster are more prone to communicable diseases due to affected infrastructure and interruption of routine immunization schedules.

“A national campaign is important because it reduces the likelihood of any individual measles case spreading to other children, keeping the population safer. A mass vaccination campaign is also among the most cost-effective preventive public health measures available.

“Vitamin A is administered along with the measles vaccination as it is a proven intervention that significantly increases children's resistance to infection, particularly measles and diarrheal diseases.”

Mr Mann says the campaign is about protecting vulnerable children and supporting their right to survival and good health.

About 30 senior nursing staff – two from each district throughout Samoa, including volunteers from the private sector – were briefed in Apia yesterday about the campaign.

“The briefing covered topics such as campaign rationale, management of syringes and treatment of adverse affects, review of logistics and equipment needs, and follow-up monitoring and evaluation. The senior nurses will return to their own districts to brief local nurses.”

Radio publicity advising the public about the campaign will begin airing in Samoa from today.

The first week of the campaign will focus on Lalomanu and Poutasi. Vaccinations will then be carried out through the rest of Upolo Island – except for Apia – followed by Savaii Island and finally the capital.

*UNICEF is a global leader in vaccine supply, reaching 40 per cent of the world's children. Immunization is a central part of our commitment to protecting the world's most vulnerable children.*

**For more information**

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