The National Measles Immunization Campaign

The National Measles Immunization Campaign is being implemented by the Ministry of Health, Health Authority – Abu Dhabi, and Dubai Health Authority (in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO)) to eliminate measles in the UAE. The campaign aims to vaccinate all people from age 1 year to 34 years (in two phases), with one dose of Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine by injection; regardless of prior vaccination status or measles disease history, to strengthen immunity against measles.

1. **Who should receive the vaccine during the campaign? When will it be implemented?**

   The campaign will be conducted in 2 phases targeting all UAE nationals and residents from age 1 to 34 years.
   - Phase 1: from 1st – 26th November, 2015; targeted age group: 1 year – 18 years.
   - Phase 2: in 2016 (dates to be announced); targeted age group: 19 – 34 years.

   One dose of MMR vaccine will be administered free of charge to the targeted groups.

   All public and private school students from kindergarten to grade 12 (or equivalent) will be vaccinated in their schools during the academic year 2015 / 2016.

2. **What are the campaign vaccination sites in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi?**

   The campaign service is provided in all public healthcare facilities and some private hospitals / clinics. For more information about campaign vaccination sites, visit: www.haad.ae

   All public and private school students from kindergarten to grade 12 (or equivalent) will be vaccinated in their schools in the school academic year 2015 / 2016. The school administrators/ nurses will contact parents/ guardians concerning the vaccination schedule for their children.

3. **Why is it important to implement this campaign?**

   - This campaign is designed to strengthen people’s immunity against measles and to ensure that the targeted groups are more fully protected.
   - Measles is a highly contagious disease that may lead to severe consequences. Therefore, it is important to eliminate the disease from the UAE (to have 0 measles cases). The UAE is committed to implement World Health Organization (WHO) strategies for the elimination of measles worldwide. Measles eradication will be achieved
through adherence to routine vaccination programs and supplementary vaccination campaigns.

- Babies who are still too young to get the vaccine and other people who are ineligible to receive the vaccine due to medical reasons rely on high vaccination coverage in the community to ensure they will not be infected with measles virus.

4. **What is measles?**

Measles is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus that can infect children and adults who are not protected. Measles is considered as one of the leading causes of disability and death among young children worldwide.

5. **What are the symptoms?**

- Usually the first symptom is a high fever; which usually begins about 10 to 21 days after exposure to the virus, and may last 4 to 7 days.
- A runny nose, cough, red and watery eyes, and small white spots inside the mouth might develop in the initial stage.
- After several days, a rash starts to erupt on the face and upper neck which then spreads downward to other parts of the body including arms, legs and feet.
- The rash lasts for 5 to 6 days before fading.

6. **How does measles be transmitted?**

The virus that causes measles spreads through the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. The virus can live for two hours in the atmosphere or on surfaces. Infected persons are usually contagious from four days before to four days after the rash appears.

7. **Is measles a serious disease?**

Measles can be very serious, especially among young children, the malnourished or those with weakened immune systems). Measles can lead to lung infection, brain damage, deafness, and sometimes death.

8. **How is measles prevented?**

Vaccination is the best, safest, and most effective tool to prevent measles. The National Immunization Program provides a combined vaccine that protects against Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR). This vaccine contains weakened strains of viruses that cause measles,
mumps and rubella. These prepare the immune system to fight the diseases before being infected.

9. **When should a person receive the MMR vaccine?**

According to the national vaccination schedule; 2 doses of MMR vaccine are given to children at age of 12 months (1 year) and age of 18 months (1.5 years). Children who do not receive the second dose at 18 months will receive it at grade 1 in school.

An additional dose during the vaccine campaign is necessary to protect the target group and the community against measles, mumps and rubella regardless of the immunization doses received earlier.

10. **Is MMR vaccine safe?**

Yes, the MMR vaccine is very safe and it complies with the highest quality standards set by the World Health Organization. The benefits of getting the vaccine far outweigh the risks of vaccine side effects, which are extremely rare. Before licensing any vaccine in the world, it is tested extremely for many years. Once a vaccine is in use, the national and international authorities are committed to assuring the safety of vaccines through strict monitoring systems.

11. **What are the side effects of MMR vaccine?**

Getting the vaccine far outweighs the risk of vaccine side effects or getting measles, mumps or rubella diseases. Vaccines, like any other medicines, may cause some side effects including redness or pain in the injected area. The risk of severe reaction is extremely rare. It is important to make sure there are no contraindications from getting the vaccine.

12. **Who should not receive MMR vaccine?**

- Who previously developed a severe reaction following MMR vaccine.
- Who are allergic to antibiotic called neomycin.
- People with health conditions which lowers immunity (e.g. leukaemia, cancer, HIV/AIDS) or who are undergoing treatment that lowers immunity (e.g. radiotherapy, chemotherapy and steroids).
- Moderately to critically sick people admitted in the hospital
- Pregnant women. Women should avoid getting pregnant for 4 weeks after vaccination with MMR vaccine.
13. Is the vaccine safe for sick people?
    Generally, MMR vaccine can be given to people if they have minor illness such as cold, but if they are moderately or critically ill, the vaccination should not be given until they are fully recovered.

14. Is there a link between MMR vaccine and autism?
    Many studies conducted concerning the link between MMR vaccine and autism have proven that MMR vaccine does not cause autism. Signs of autism typically appear around the age that children receive MMR vaccination (between 12 – 18 months) but the vaccine has no link to autism.
    This rumour originated when a gastroenterologist announced that he found virus from the vaccine residing in the intestines of 12 autistic children and, therefore, he hypothesized that the MMR vaccine caused autism. Many other researchers attempted to verify this finding in larger studies but none could confirm the result. Subsequent investigations discovered that the gastroenterologist’s research was highly suspect. Eventually, his study was retracted by the medical journal that published it and the gastroenterologist lost his license to practice medicine.

15. If the child receives the vaccine during the campaign, does that mean, they do not have to be vaccinated again as per the routine vaccination schedule?
    The dose the child will get during the campaign is an additional dose. It is important that children should still receive the complete series of routine vaccination doses.
    If the routine vaccination appointment is scheduled in the same period for the campaign, the dose which has been taken will be recorded twice, on the vaccination card as part of the campaign and on the child’s vaccination record.

16. If the child has already been fully immunized in the routine vaccination program. Do they still require the campaign dose?
    Yes, the child needs to get the campaign dose regardless of the number of doses taken during the routine vaccination.
    During immunization campaigns, vaccination and disease history are not taken into consideration to decide whether vaccination is required or not. Receiving an extra dose of MMR vaccine during the campaign is safe and poses no significant medical harm.
If the child is already immune against measles, mumps and rubella and receive the vaccine, their immune system will clear the body from the vaccine by a process similar to that which the body uses to clear the disease virus.

17. Should the vaccine be given again to children even if they have received the vaccine one day or one week before, during routine vaccination?

During immunization campaigns, vaccination and disease history are not taken into consideration to decide whether vaccination is required or not. Receiving an extra dose of MMR vaccine during the campaign is safe and causes no significant medical harm.

If the child is already immune against measles, mumps and rubella and receive the vaccine, their immune system will readily clear the vaccine attenuated viruses from their bodies.

18. Why not to use Measles vaccine instead of MMR vaccine in the campaign?

Both Measles and MMR vaccines are safe and effective. Measles vaccine is produced and used only in few areas around the world. However, MMR vaccine is used worldwide in immunization programs. It provides an extra advantage over the measles-only vaccine by also giving protection against mumps and rubella, other highly contagious diseases.