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## **PRESS RELEASE**

# **UNICEF hands vehicles and Cold Chain Equipment to Ministry of Health and Sanitation's EPI Programme**

**Freetown, 21<sup>th</sup> April 2021** - In a move to strengthen the cold chain system of the country's Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Sierra Leone, with support from GAVI, today handed over two vehicles and Cold Chain Equipment to the Ministry of Health and Sanitation.

The two vehicles will be used for the strengthening of the national EPI Programme Management and Oversight function through regular monitoring and supervisory visits to service delivery level. The vehicles will also support other critical elements of effective health care delivery, including surveillance, logistics and improve outreach programmes to reach children with critical services.

The Cold Chain Equipment, which includes 11 sets of larger solar refrigerators, each with a storage capacity of 220 liters and which will support the establishment of district vaccine stores at Falaba and Kerene, 171 sets of solar refrigerators to be installed across health facilities in the country and 260 cold boxes, will help to ensure that vaccines remain potent and effective at all levels.

"The pandemic has given rise to reduced rates of routine immunization coverage which places children at greater risk. We are appreciative of UNICEF's contribution in bolstering immunization coverage to raise immunity levels among children in Sierra Leone" said Dr. Austin Demby, Minister of Health and Sanitation.

The handover of the vehicles and the Cold Chain Equipment is timely as in December, the country reported the first known cases of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2). As of now, there are a total of 14 cVDPV2 cases confirmed in the country.

According to data collected and released in 2020 by the World Health Organization, UNICEF, Gavi and the Sabin Vaccine Institute, the provision of routine immunisation services has been substantially hindered a global scale by the COVID-19 outbreak. Health delivery system is overstretched, responding to the current COVID-19 outbreak, while some children have fallen back on their immunisation schedules as some parents were unable to leave home because of restrictions on movement, lack of information or because they fear infection with the COVID-19 virus.

"It remains very important for children and babies to keep their vaccinations up to date, even during this period when we are responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic," said UNICEF Representative, Dr. Suleiman Braimoh. "Vaccination is key to protecting our children and building safer communities free from harmful vaccine-preventable diseases such as polio, measles, tetanus."



The donated vehicles and cold chain equipment will be extremely helpful as the country plans to conduct a series of vaccination campaigns in 2021, including novel Oral Polio Vaccine type 2 (nOPV2) campaign in response to the polio outbreak, Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV) and routine immunisation catch-up campaign, Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) catch-up campaign and COVID-19 vaccine deployment.

With support from GAVI, UNICEF worked to provide ongoing support to Sierra Leone's EPI programme, including through strengthening effective vaccine management practices, engaging communities to create vaccine demand, provision of solar refrigerators for vaccine storage and the procurement and delivery of vaccines, including during the peak period of COVID-19, when most air companies were not operating.

**For more information, please contact**

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