

PRESS RELEASE

Child Health Week, 23-29 March, launched in four provinces UNICEF joins DoH to introduce high-impact, low-cost health packages in most deprived districts

23 March 2009...Acknowledging the country's first ever Child Health Week, UNICEF has joined with the Department of Health in an intense 7-day promotion aimed at introducing critical health interventions to improve the health of children under five years old, in four key districts in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Free State and North West provinces.

Child Health Week provides the opportunity to reach children who are not reached through the conventional health system channels, providing them with a package of high impact and low-cost interventions including immunization, Vitamin A supplementation and de-worming, that are essential to improving children's health.

It is envisaged that lessons learned during the provision of services to the four most deprived districts will provide a blueprint for scaling-up such activities for the National launch in September 2009 which will focus on 53 districts.

UNICEF has extensively advocated and provided technical support to the National Department of Health in the development of a strategic plan which gives priority to the challenges that hinder the delivery of optimal, equitable health care services.

Aida Girma, UNICEF South Africa Representative, who participated in the launch of the Week in Ilembe District, KwaZulu-Natal, said UNICEF considers Child Health Week action as being a key delivery mechanism towards accelerating high-impact, low-cost interventions, closer to where children reside, as articulated within the Department of Health's 18 Priority District Initiative.

"We believe that if these interventions are undertaken twice yearly, as is the plan this year, they will be a major contributor in the country's progression towards the Millennium Development Goals in particular Goal 4, on child survival and development," she said.

The children's organisation said Child Health Week strengthens efforts to reach children
Other goals include:

- providing catch-up immunization to missed or defaulting children

PRESS RELEASE

- increasing community awareness of the importance of key family care practices, in particular immunization, Vitamin A supplementation and early growth faltering detection, and
- documenting lessons learned in rendering integrated services for maximum coverage and impact for future Child Health Weeks.

UNICEF provides district level support and targeting

Outlining UNICEF’s planned actions during to the week, Joan Matji, Snr. Nutrition Specialist at UNICEF South Africa said, “Activities will focus on district level social mobilization, bringing outreach health services into the communities, raising awareness to help create demand for these interventions; identifying children in need and encouraging mothers and family members to bring their children in regularly to access these services. Initiatives such as Child Health Week are intended to work in conjunction with routine services at health facilities, and not as a replacement” she added.

UNICEF will continue to work closely with the Department of Health in targeting the four most deprived districts from the four selected provinces. UNICEF’s role focuses on ensuring supportive supervision and on-site training, community links with service delivery, and effective monitoring and the use of data for action and better planning and management of human and financial resources during the Child Health week, Ms. Matji said.

Key stakeholders in the implementation of these activities include: health workers, NGOs, community health workers and community members.

Province	District	Sub-district
Free State	Thabo Mofutsanyane	Maluti a Phofung
KwaZulu-Natal	ILembe	Maphumulo
Eastern Cape	Ukhahlamba	Senqu
North West	Bojanala Platinum	Moretele

Underscoring the importance of documentation on the coverage of this week’s interventions in the 4 districts, UNICEF said that the evidence gathered will enable the country in to demonstrate the impact of integrated child health services in bettering the outcomes for children. UNICEF also expressed its commitment to help strengthen the Government’s efforts to improve child survival and nutritional wellbeing of South African women and children.

PRESS RELEASE

“UNICEF remains committed to providing support for the implementation of the strategic plan, particularly in the most deprived districts. This includes the development of a comprehensive and coordinated framework for provision of health and nutrition services and the strengthening of community-based health and nutrition programmes. One of the key interventions in response to this mandate is the undertaking of a South Africa’s first ever Child Health Week,” Ms. Girma said.

ends

For further information please contact UNICEF South Africa:

Media: Yvonne Duncan, Mobile: + 27 82 561-3970, yduncan@unicef.org

Kate Pawelczyk, Mobile: + 2773 156 3650, kpawelczyk@unicef.org

Health: Joan Matji, Mobile: 27 79 498 4993, jmatji@unicef.org