

**Address by Minister Amina  
(MOH): Meningitis Vaccination Campaign**



First and for most, allow me to welcome you all, to this important event, of launching the Meningitis Vaccination Campaign, and Vitamin-A supplementation for our children and young adults.

As you all know, Vaccines are among the most cost-effective public health and clinical preventive-service interventions, as well as, the core component of any preventive service packages.

At the same time, we know that prevention is better than cure! By the same token; childhood immunization program provides a very high return on investment. Likewise, awareness of disease and carrying out prevention and treatment courses remain essential components for reducing infectious disease transmission.

**Ladies and Gentlemen!**

In recognition of the importance of vaccines, Eritrea has been working diligently to reduce the negative impact of vaccine-preventable diseases. For this reason, Eritrea has policies and appropriate strategies to reduce morbidity and mortality and thereby, increasing productivity that would directly and indirectly contribute to the economic development of the country.

At this point, “The Expanded Program on Immunization” is one of the most successful programs in Eritrea. We are providing 12 types of vaccines to prevent diseases, including tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, whooping cough, meningitis, and Rota vaccine, among others.

Besides, yellow fever vaccine is being provided for those who travel outside of the country. In addition to the above mentioned, Vitamin-A capsules to prevent vitamin A deficiency is being provided.

In Eritrea there are 285 static immunization program sites, and 385 outreach sites. Moreover, we conduct Sustainable Outreach Services (SOS) and Reach Every District (RED) Services.

Using these approaches, and additional activities, we are able to achieve over 95% coverage against ten diseases for which, we are on control stage, while we have practically eliminated the other two diseases namely poliomyelitis and both maternal & childhood tetanus.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen!**

Today’s launching of Meningitis-A immunizations is against meningococcal-A meningitis which is, a bacterial infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord, that have spread up across 26 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, killing and disabling young people every year.

Meningitis-A is highly contagious disease in our continent; it can kill or cause severe brain damage within hours. The disease is spread from person-to-person through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions, by coughing, kissing, or sharing eating utensils.

Children aged between 5-14 years, are the most high risk groups. Meningitis manifested by severe headache, fever, vomiting, bulging of the fontanel in infants, sensitivity to light and neck stiffness, which can lead to - convulsions, delirium and death.

At the same time, Meningitis can cause severe brain damage, and it is fatal in 50% of the cases. But, if it is treated soon, the case-fatality rate can be reduced by 5-10%.

Meningitis also creates great burden on individuals, families, and the health systems of the affected countries. Epidemics usually start at the beginning of the calendar year (January to February) when dry sands from the Sahara Desert begins blowing southward.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen!**

Our campaign also includes vitamin 'A' supplementation for children aged 6 to 59 months. As we all know, Infants and children have a high requirement of vitamin A for promoting rapid growth and for combating infections.

Vitamin A Deficiency (VAD), in children manifests itself as severe respiratory infection, diarrheal diseases, eye diseases ranging from exophthalmia (dry eyes), night blindness, and to a more serious sight threatening keratomalacia (melting of the cornea), that leads to corneal scars. Therefore, Vitamin-A supplementation is critically important, not only to prevent all the above-mentioned diseases, but also as essential element for child growth and survival.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen!**

At this time, we are conducting catch-up campaign of Meningitis-A vaccination for the age group, ranging from 1-30 years. This will be followed by the introduction of this vaccine in our routine immunization program for children in the age range 1 to 5 years. The introduction of Meningitis-A vaccine in the routine immunization program will prevent morbidity and mortality of our children. To this effect, the Ministry of Health of the State of Eritrea is officially launching this vaccination today, and as usual, the Ministry is committed to continue the routine immunization program that includes Meningitis-A vaccine. Moreover, distribution of vitamin 'A' will be reinforced.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to all Parents of the Beloved Children, Government, Non-Government Partners, & Staff Members of Ministry of Health, who are contributing to the success of this important campaign.

**I thank you all!**