



Joint Media Release

Rotavirus Vaccine launched in Solomon Islands

24th June 2020 – The Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS) this week launched the introduction of a new vaccine into the Solomon Islands National Immunization schedule, the Rotavirus Vaccine. The vaccine is used to protect against rotavirus, a very contagious virus, and a common cause of severe diarrhea among infants and young children.

Globally it is responsible for over 215 thousand deaths annually amongst infants and young children. In Solomon Islands the rotavirus was first detected in 2014 during the diarrhea outbreak along the Guadalcanal plains and Honiara in the aftermath of the April flash flooding.

Sadly, the virus had resulted in the loss of around 27 lives most of whom were infants and young children with over 6 thousand cases of severe diarrhea and dehydration reported across the country.

Since then, the introduction of rotavirus vaccine has been planned by the MHMS and the funding commitments were finalized and detailed introduction plans initiated with GAVI (International Organization established to improve access to new and underused vaccines for children living in the world's poorest countries) funds from 2019.

In his remarks during the launch, Chief of UNICEF Solomon Islands Office Dr. Zelalem Taffesse said that UNICEF is pleased to support the introduction of the vaccine into the Expanded Program of Immunization in the country.

“Children are at the very core of our Mandate. We are pleased to support the procurement and delivery of the vaccines, installation of fridges to maintain and accommodate the vaccines and design and production of vital information, education and communication materials to inform parents and communities on the use of rotavirus vaccine”.

“Rotavirus Vaccine is recommended as 2 doses with the minimum interval of 4 weeks. The schedule is at ages 6 and 10 weeks and will be administered along other vaccines such as OPV, Penta and PCV therefore will not require a separate visit to the health facility”, explained Dr. Taffesse.

He also highlighted the need to enhance the regular immunization program as part of continuity of basic health care provided by the Ministry of Health to avoid diminishing the gains made so far to ensure that children continue to get the best opportunity to thrive.

“With this I’d like to assure of UNICEF’s continued commitment and dedication to work closely with Solomon Islands government as well as all stakeholders including GAVI, WHO

and our traditional donors to ensure all children in Solomon Islands realize their full potential in life”, Stated Dr. Zelalem.

Also delivering her remarks at the launch was the WHO Country Representative Dr. Sevil Huseynova who highlighted that the Rotavirus vaccine is safe and effective.

“The rotavirus vaccine is very safe, WHO through the Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety (Called GACVS) monitors ALL vaccines and we continue our support to MHMS in monitoring the vaccine safety in Solomon Islands a responsive Adverse Events Following Immunization Reporting System, as such there is no need for parents to be afraid to bring their children to receive the rotavirus vaccine.

“Rotavirus vaccine is also a very effective vaccine. Studies have shown that a two dose schedule has efficacy in the range of 80 -90 percent. This essentially means that babies, following a completion of the two dose schedule, are 80 to 90 percent immune from the Rotavirus,” explained Dr Huseynova.

She however cautioned that the vaccine only prevents diarrhea that is caused by rotaviruses which constitute 40 percent of all diarrhea cases. “As such diarrheas caused by other factors will continue to occur so it is important that efforts to promote and continue practice breast feeding, handwashing, hygiene preparation of food, improved water and sanitation must continue.

WHO together with MHMS have completed the introduction of the rotavirus vaccine in 5 provinces, Western, Malaita, Makira, Central, Guadalcanal and Honiara City Council. Technical support by WHO includes the trainings for nurses on the new Rotavirus vaccine hand book as well as review and updating of reporting forms and registries to ensure proper administration of the vaccine and data collection.

MHMS Permanent Secretary Mrs. Pauline McNeil in delivering the key note address, highlighted MHMS’s commitment towards the health of the children. “While today marks yet another milestone in the history of immunization in Solomon Islands it also goes to show the commitment and dedication that MHMS continues to offer to our children and in this case, the protection against rotavirus through significant financial allocations and collaborative efforts to avail the vaccine in country”.

Mrs. McNeil stated that MHMS had worked closely with its partners in ensuring that the vaccines are procured, delivered and remain safe up until its usage. “On this note I wish to acknowledge GAVI, UNICEF and WHO for both the financial and technical support rendered. We remain grateful and on behalf of all our children across the country, a very big thank you”.

She encourages all parents to ensure that their babies receive the rotavirus vaccine as well as all other vaccines in the immunization scheduled so that the children can grow up healthy to reach their full potential.

For further enquiries related to this press release please contact Atenia Eribania Tahu MHMS Corporate Communications Officer on email: ATahu@moh.gov.sb or phone: 7478857.



Photo Captions

Pic 1. White River Clinic nurse administering the rotavirus vaccine a 6 weeks old Edwin Iro during the launch as WHO Country Representative Dr. Sevil Huseynova, MHMS PS Mrs. Pauline McNeil and Chief of UNICEF Solomon Islands Office Dr. Zelalem Taffesse watch with excitement.

Pic 2. 6 weeks old Prince Kafai receiving his first dose of rotavirus during the launch. Next dose of the vaccine will be at 10 weeks old.

Pic.3 Mum trying to wake baby Edwin Iro who is asleep. Rotavirus vaccine is to be administered when babies are awake.