

Integrated Maternal and Child Health Campaign 2007: A Golden Jubilee Gift to Ghana's Children

Background

The Ministry of Health has developed a Programme of Work for 2007 which includes a focus of scaling up coverage of the National Health Insurance Scheme, with provision of adequate funding to support services for exempt categories such as all children under 18 years. Scaling up interventions against diseases of public health importance under the POW 2007, primarily through the High Impact, Rapid Delivery (HIRD) strategy, includes increasing coverage of insecticide treated nets among young children and pregnant women, twice-yearly provision of Vitamin A supplements and deworming for children, and increasing the proportion of supervised deliveries. In addition, there is expressed need to accelerate activities to improve maternal health.

A successful National Child Health Campaign was carried out in November 2006, piggy-backing on the national measles campaign with polio immunization, vitamin A supplementation, and long-lasting insecticide-treated nets (LLINs) for all children under 2 years of age. This was a very successful event, despite the logistical challenges involved, and public education efforts now continue to ensure proper utilization of the LLINs. While the full impact of the 2006 campaign is yet to be realized, it is clear that campaigns do indeed have a positive impact, as there have been no measles deaths in Ghana since the 2002 measles campaign.

As a group, children under five are still the most vulnerable to illness and death. Morbidity and mortality rates among young children remain high in Ghana, with about 80,000 children under five dying each year, mostly from preventable causes. Globally, out of 191 countries, Ghana ranks near the bottom (42nd) with respect to under-five mortality. Maternal mortality remains high in Ghana, and the proportion of supervised deliveries, although rising slowly, is still only about 50%.

In order to further accelerate efforts in Ghana to improve the health and well-being of women and children, it is proposed to conduct another integrated campaign at the end of November 2007 as part of Ghana's 50th anniversary celebrations. The tentative dates are **November 28-30, 2007**. This campaign will focus not only on young children, but also on pregnant and post-partum women, in order to make this a truly "**Maternal and Child Health Campaign**". This campaign would include:

For Children:

- Polio vaccine for children 0-59 months
- Vitamin A supplementation for children 6-59 Months
- Deworming for children 24-59 months
- Long Lasting Insecticide-treated Nets (LLINs) for children 0-12 months (those children born subsequent to the Nov/06 campaign)
- Birth Registration for children

For Pregnant Women:

- Long Lasting Insecticide-treated Nets for all pregnant women

For Post-Partum (Lactating) Women:

- Vitamin A supplementation for women within 8 weeks post-partum (if not already supplemented)

Polio Vaccination

Since September 2003 there has been no case of wild polio virus in Ghana and the country is due for polio-free certification this year. However the certification puts a greater responsibility on the country to maintain a polio-free status. The country will be relying on a strengthened routine polio vaccination for the eradication of poliomyelitis and a good surveillance system. Opportunity will be taken of this campaign to provide immunization with one dose of the polio vaccine to boost

the immunization levels of our under fives. This measure is necessary, since our neighbours in Nigeria still have a lot of wild polio viruses in circulation.

Insecticide-Treated Nets

Malaria remains the largest single killer of children, accounting for about 25% of deaths and 40% of OPD and hospital admissions. During the 2006 Campaign, all children under two years of age were provided with nets. By the second half of 2007, these children will be in the 12 to 36 month age bracket. The availability of about 1.5 million LLINs would allow nets to be provided to all those children born after the 2006 campaign (children under 12 months) and attain universal coverage of children under five in Ghana. In addition, pregnant women are at high risk for malaria, and provision of LLINs to this group will reduce malaria in pregnancy and lead to healthier mothers and infants. This would need to be followed by ongoing routine distribution of nets to pregnant women through antenatal care services and young children through child welfare clinics in order to sustain coverage among vulnerable groups. In addition, it is recognized that more effort must be put into educating communities on the proper utilization of nets, for children and pregnant women to sleep under the nets each night, in order to achieve maximum impact.

Deworming

February 12th 2007 is "National Deworming Day" for school children in Ghana under the School Health Education Programme (SHEP). On that day, all school children in Ghana will receive deworming medication. Given the high rates of anaemia and undernutrition among pre-school children in Ghana, there is a need to provide regular deworming medication to all "pre-school" children 2 to 5 years of age, who are not covered by the SHEP programme. In addition, provision of deworming medication to pregnant women during the 2nd and 3rd trimester of pregnancy reduces maternal anemia and results in improved health outcomes for both mother and infant.

Vitamin A Supplementation (VAC)

It is widely recognized that the twice-yearly provision of vitamin A reduces "all-cause" child mortality by about 20%. While efforts are being made to strengthen routine distribution of VAC to children through routine EPI services, mass distribution as part of the Child Health Promotion Week (CHPW) in Ghana has been instrumental in ensuring high coverage. Provision of VAC during the campaign will allow a second opportunity during 2007 for children to receive supplementation, and complement the May 2007 CHPW activities. In addition, the provision of Vitamin A to post-partum women within 8 weeks of delivery improves maternal health and assists with supplementation of the breastfeeding infant.

Birth Registration

The birth registration coverage rose encouragingly from 17 per cent to 67 per cent between 2002 and 2005 (through 29 and 51 per cent in 2003 and 2004 respectively). These improvements are partly the result of very fruitful collaboration between the Birth and Deaths Registry and Ministry of Health/Ghana Health Service to integrate birth registration into the existing Primary Health Care programme. Since 2004, registration of children has been an integral part of the package of free services being offered during the Child Health Promotion Week. The Government decided in 2004 to waive the registrations fee for all children under 12 months in order to encourage more parents to register their children as soon as they were born. This was important but not enough to get all children registered (including addressing the back-log of children >one year). For three consecutive years, Ghana has celebrated National Birth Registration Day on 1 September, in collaboration with partners such as UNICEF, Plan Ghana and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. This has ensured high level momentum on the importance of registration of all children. The impending campaign offers an opportunity to further improve birth registration coverage.

Key Messages for Integrated Maternal and Child Health Campaign 2007

Theme: *Healthier mothers and children in Ghana's Golden Jubilee year and beyond*

From 28th – 30th November 2007, take your child under five years to the nearest immunization centre for free child health services

CHILDREN

- ❖ Immunize and protect your child against childhood diseases
- ❖ Complete your child's immunization before the child is 12 months old
- ❖ At six months of age, take your child to the clinic for Vitamin A. Continue every six months until your child is five years
- ❖ Vitamin A makes children and nursing mothers strong and healthy.
- ❖ Take your child for weighing regularly from birth to five years.
- ❖ To prevent malaria ensure that your child sleeps under an insecticide treated net
- ❖ De-worm your child above 2 years every six months for good health.
- ❖ Wash your hands with soap before meals and after visiting the toilet.
- ❖ Register your baby at birth or within one year. It gives the child legal recognition and social protection.

Pregnant Women

- ❖ Visit the antenatal clinic as soon as you know you are pregnant to ensure a healthy pregnancy and safe delivery.
- ❖ Attend antenatal clinic regularly to benefit from all services required by the pregnant woman.
- ❖ Prevent malaria, sleep under an insecticide treated net every night
- ❖ Take all the drugs you are given at the antenatal clinic for a healthy pregnancy
- ❖ Deliver your baby at a health facility.

After birth:

- ❖ Visit the health facility within 7 days after birth for you and your baby to be examined and treated if necessary.

- ❖ Start breastfeeding within 30 minutes after delivery and give your child only breast milk from birth to six months.
- ❖ After six months continue breastfeeding along with other foods until the child is two years..
- ❖ Wash your hands with soap before handling your baby
- ❖ Always take your sick child to the health facility for early treatment.
- ❖ Birth spacing improves the health of mothers and children. Talk to your health provider about family planning

By the end of Ghana's 50th Jubilee Year, all young children and pregnant women will be sleeping under Insecticide-Treated Nets; children under 5 will be free of worms, and protected with Polio vaccine and Vitamin A; Children under one will be registered for birth, The result will be Healthier Mothers and Children! And of course Happier families!