Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 28 November 2016—Haiti's Ministry of Health (MSPP) is nearing completion of its vaccination campaign against cholera, having reached more than 729,000 people with vaccines in Sud and Grand Anse departments, areas ravaged by Hurricane Matthew.

With support from the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and other partners, vaccination teams fanned out across the two departments starting Nov. 8, aiming to reduce the burden of cholera cases by immunizing people in 16 different communes where cholera cases had been reported and where water and sanitation systems were damaged.

Ministry of Health early reports show that vaccination coverage reached 94 percent in Grande Anse and 90 percent in Sud Department, but the communes of Moron (Grande Anse), Port-a-Piment, and Chardonnieres (Sud) had lower than average coverage. In some areas teams were hampered by difficult access as roads were cut by the hurricane, and populations were displaced, said PAHO-WHO Representative Dr. Jean-Luc Poncelet. Ministry of Health officials are now collecting data and consolidating results, while looking for pockets of unvaccinated people in the communes.

Epidemiologists and immunization experts were mobilized to support the campaign, which was carried out with 1 million doses of oral cholera vaccine provided by GAVI through the Global Task Force for Cholera Control. The International Medical Corps (IMC), CDC, UNICEF, WFP, PIH, Gheskio, and other vaccination partners supported the Ministry in the campaign, with social mobilization and logistics, including cold chain to keep vaccines potent, and transport and support for vaccination brigades. Haiti's Minister of Public Health, Dr. Daphne Benoit, noted when the campaign began that "The vaccine is an additional intervention which will help us to save lives, but does not replace the efforts that the government supports in the field of water and sanitation."

Poncelet stressed the importance for all partners to join forces in assisting the Ministry for the Ministry of Health to "work together and with partners to build local capacity for clinical management of cases in the cholera treatment centers."

Since Hurricane Matthew struck Haiti October 4, more than 5,800 suspected cholera cases have been reported by the Ministry of Health, while the population in need of humanitarian assistance remains at 1.4 million, and more than 175,000 people are still in shelters, according to PAHO's latest situation report. Increases in suspected malaria cases have been observed in Grand Ánse and Sud both Departments, and Haiti's National program for Malaria Control began fumigation and destruction of mosquito breeding sites.

Haiti still needs humanitarian assistance for rural areas, rehabilitation of health facilities, household access to chlorinated water and community health workers especially for areas with non-functional facilities, Poncelet said.

PAHO works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of their populations. Founded in 1902, it serves as the World Health Organization (WHO) regional office for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system.