Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, 29 September 2017 – The International Coordinating Group (ICG) on Vaccine Provision will release 900,000 doses of the Oral Cholera Vaccine (OCV) from the global stockpile to prevent the spread of cholera among recently arrived vulnerable populations and host communities in areas around Cox’s Bazar.

The Government of Bangladesh made the request to the ICG on 27 September, and the approval was granted in 24 hours by the coordinating mechanism that brings together WHO, UNICEF, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), and the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC).

ICG partners – with support from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance – will deliver 900,000 doses of Oral Cholera Vaccine to Bangladesh within two weeks for an immunization campaign due to start in October.

“This is a precautionary step to avoid a preventable cholera outbreak,” said Dr. Abul Kalam Azad, Director General of Health Services at the Bangladesh Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. “We appreciate the support and speed of partners in delivering on this urgent request, and we look forward to receiving and using the vaccines.”

More than half a million people have crossed from Myanmar to Bangladesh since 25 August following violence in Rakhine State.

Many are crowded into camps or temporary settlements with challenging access to clean water and sanitation amid heavy rains; this increases the risk of vector and waterborne diseases such as cholera.

“We are doing everything we can to prevent an outbreak, including pre-positioning supplies, implementing disease surveillance and monitoring water quality,” said Dr. Navaratnasamy Paranietharan, WHO Representative in Bangladesh. “A vaccination campaign will help to keep this vulnerable population safe from cholera.”

Gavi, WHO and partners are working with the Government of Bangladesh to make the vaccine available free-of-charge to affected populations, while supporting ongoing cholera prevention and preparedness.

“There is an urgent need to protect the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees who have sought shelter in Bangladesh as well as resident population with the oral cholera vaccine,” said Dr Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. “We are gravely concerned by the critical situation that they are facing and by the potential public health disaster that could occur if we don’t act fast. The vaccine is an important tool to protect them against the disease and ultimately save lives.”

OCVs provide immediate, short-term protection that can be implemented while interventions to improve access to safe water and sanitation are put into place.

http://www.searo.who.int/mediacentre/releases/2017/1666/en/