BANGUI, CAR I 2 January 2014 - Following the confirmation by the Bangui Pasteur Institute of cases of measles in two camps for displaced persons – near Bangui airport (3 cases) and at the Don Bosco Centre in Damala (5 cases) - WHO, UNICEF, MSF and other partners will support an emergency response immunization campaign to control this epidemic starting Friday, 3 January 2014.

More than 60 000 children aged between 6 months and 15 years will be covered by the immunization activities, 40 000 at the airport camp and more than 20 000 at the other affected site, the Don Bosco Centre at Damala.

WHO teams visited the two sites on Tuesday 31 December 2013 to investigate the cases.

‘‘We have a total of 5 reported cases at our site, 3 confirmed in the laboratory and 2 based on an epidemiological link,’’ explained Dr Evariste Pabingui from the Don Bosco Centre at Damala, which currently has a displaced population of approximately 50 000 who have fled the violent clashes in the capital of the Central African Republic that started on 5 December 2013.

‘‘Our biggest concern is the overcrowded conditions and the lack of on-site individual and collective sanitation, which could contribute to the rapid spread of the disease unless urgent measures are taken to halt the current outbreak,’’ Dr Pabingui said. At this camp north of the capital, two vaccination posts staffed by four vaccination teams have been set up to kick-start the imminent vaccine response.

The displaced population at the airport camp, one of the most densely populated in Bangui, is estimated by OCHA to be 100 000. MSF Belgium is the principal operational partner in the response effort, with responsibility among other things for medical and surgical emergencies.

‘‘We have already positioned 13 vaccination teams at 3 sites in the airport camp,’’ explained Loris De Filippi, MSF operations manager, adding that MSF has already mobilized 50 000 doses of vaccine for the response campaign.

Meanwhile, according to Dr John Egbe Agbor, director of immunization at UNICEF, “vaccines and inoculation equipment are already available to UNICEF, which will also provide additional resources to the implementing partners in terms of operating costs’’.

WHO will provide technical and financial support to the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) of the Ministry of Health in order to supervise these immunization activities that should take between 3 and 5 days. It will also ensure that the campaign is properly documented and of high quality.

Other partners such as MdM and ALIMA have also strengthened surveillance at a number of other sites in Bangui to cope with this health emergency.