Les Cayes, Haiti, 8 November 2016 (PAHO/WHO) - A large contingent of national supervisors, nurses, health workers and criesurs, or town criers, are being mobilized by the Ministry of Health and Population of Haiti to vaccinate some 800,000 people living in 16 communes in the departments of Sud and Grand'Anse, the areas most affected by Hurricane Mathew a month ago.

The campaign, which has the support of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and other partners, began today and will run until November 14. The objective is to reduce the morbidity and mortality caused by cholera and to prevent the spread of the disease in other departments of the country. To ensure that there is collective protection a vaccine will be applied to each person over one year of age living in the 16 communes targeted for vaccination. According to experts, this single vaccine will avoid between 60% and 70% of severe cases of cholera.

As part of this vaccination campaign, PAHO / WHO mobilized a group of epidemiologists and immunization experts to provide technical support for the campaign. Vaccines provided by the GAVI alliance are already on the ground, and the International Medical Corps (IMC), UNICEF and other vaccination partners have readied components for the campaign. These include preservation of the cold chain to keep vaccines potent, social mobilization actions, and logistical support for vaccination brigades.

The Minister of Health of Haiti, Daphnée Benoit Delsoin, stressed that "Vaccination is a tool for the control of cholera; it is an additional measure to achieve the elimination of cholera in Haiti." The minister launched the campaign in Les Cayes and applied the first dose of the oral vaccine against cholera. The launch took place in Les Cayes, with the presence of local authorities such as the mayor, parliamentary deputy of the area, representative of the president at local level, among others.

"Vaccination is complementary to other preventive measures," said Jean Luc Poncelet, PAHO / WHO representative in Haiti, at the launch of the campaign. "Each person must be a leader of change: daily chlorination of water in the house, drinking potable water, rehydration if there is diarrhea, and seeking treatment. To avoid deaths, there are health services that are working and available. "

Since Hurricane Matthew struck Haiti on 4 October, there has been a significant increase in suspected cases of cholera and deaths in several places in the departments of Sud and Grand'Anse.
In addition to the vaccination campaign, national authorities strongly emphasized the importance of providing safe water, and are making continuous calls for the population to practice hand hygiene and food washing measures before consumption.

Control of the cholera epidemic in Haiti still faces multiple challenges. For this reason, the

government and humanitarian organizations, including PAHO/WHO, are calling for the international community to continue channeling contributions to save lives in Haiti.

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.