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## Global childhood vaccination rates remain lower than pre-COVID-19 levels, says WHO

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Geneva, July 15 (QNA)– The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) announced Monday that global childhood vaccination rates remain lower than pre-COVID-19 levels, raising concerns among experts.

Global childhood immunization coverage stalled in 2023, leaving 2.7 million additional children under-vaccinated compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019, according to data published today by WHO) and UNICEF.

These trends, which show that global immunization coverage has remained largely unchanged since 2022 and more alarmingly – has still not returned to 2019 levels, reflect ongoing challenges with disruptions in healthcare services, logistical challenges, vaccine hesitancy and inequities in access to services.

“The latest trends demonstrate that many countries continue to miss far too many children,” said UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell.

“Closing the immunization gap requires a global effort, with governments, partners, and local leaders investing in primary healthcare and community workers to ensure every child gets vaccinated, and that overall healthcare is strengthened.” UNICEF Expert Ephrem T. Lemango affirmed that low-income countries lack confidence in healthcare facilities, and restricting access to vaccines also hinders progress in vaccination efforts.

According to UNICEF and the WHO, armed conflicts pose a barrier, as more than half of unvaccinated children live in countries experiencing unrest and violence. Additionally, over 100 countries have been affected by measles outbreaks in the past five years.