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School Health Study reveals an Unhealthy Environment for Students in Iraq's Primary Schools

11 May 2009 (Amman- Baghdad) – Nearly half of primary schools in Iraq lack the minimum requirements necessary for a safe and healthy educational environment according to the latest School Health Survey.

This survey was conducted by the Iraqi Ministry of Health (MoH) and Ministry of Education (MoE), Central Organization of Statistical and Information Technology (COSIT), and Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education in Kurdistan region in close collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2007/2008.

Dr. Saleh Al-Hasnawi, the Iraqi Minister of Health asserts, "Results of the School Health Survey mark an important call to action to improve the conditions of primary schools in Iraq He adds, "Every child has a right to an education in a safe and healthy environment".

Based on a sample of 150 schools representing eight governorates, this survey reveals that 48 percent of primary schools assessed are unclean.

Moreover, 63 percent of schools surveyed did not have chlorine testing of drinking water placing children at high risk of water borne diseases. These results are particularly surprising given that 65 percent of water supplied to the schools surveyed come from government networks plagued with leaky pipes that are vulnerable to contamination.

The survey also reports that male students are more likely to be exposed to trauma than female students and experience a higher prevalence of trauma related eye injuries. These findings indicate that boys are more active and eager to engage in violent behavior.

The Minister of Education, Khudair Al-Khuzai, stated "cases of malnutrition, chronic diseases and mental problems were recorded in more impoverished school" he further clarified. "Education and health are critical elements of human development and are closely interlinked with [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs".

In light of the survey results, Dr Naeema Al-Gasseer, Representative of WHO in Iraq states, "WHO is very concerned about the current environment of Iraqi schools and for the health of the children who attend them especially the older students who demonstrate a higher prevalence of health problems". She adds, "Delays in the early detection and treatment of visual and hearing difficulties and musculo-skeletal abnormalities may lead to deteriorated school performance, learning disabilities and other health problems in the future".

In more encouraging results, the majority of food served at school canteens was found suitable for consumption. In addition, only a minority of students were demonstrated to suffer from health problems such as visual and hearing difficulties and musculo-skeletal abnormalities. Hearing aids and eye glasses were provided to students in need and those reporting body abnormalities were sent to specialized clinics.



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The School Health Screening is a major component of the Health Promoting Schools project which is funded by the UNDG- ITF and the European Commission.

The Health Promoting Schools project was initiated by the World Health Organization/ European Region in the early 1990s. It was first implemented in Iraq in 1995 and later revitalized by the Ministry of Health in 2007 through the National School Health Strategy which currently covers 46 primary schools. Reference to conducted survey recommendations have been made to expand the scope of this project to reach 100% of primary schools in Iraq.

For more information www.emro.who.int/iraq