

## Hepatitis B threatens an entire culture with extinction

LIMA, 13 June 2005 – UNICEF, working with the Peruvian Ministry of Health, has launched a vaccination campaign to stop a Hepatitis B epidemic in the Upper Amazon. The disease, if not controlled, threatens to wipe out two indigenous groups, the Candoshis and the Shapras. Both groups live in relative isolation from the outside world, maintaining a rich and traditional culture.

At the time the vaccination campaign was initiated in 2003, the Hepatitis B epidemic had already infiltrated all 49 communities and affected over 3,000 people in Candoshi and Shapra. One of the best ways to stop the outbreak is to vaccinate newborn babies during the first 24 hours of their life, and to supply subsequent doses to children before the age of six months.

Since the beginning of the campaign, 245 of the 298 newborn – almost 82 per cent – were vaccinated within 24 hours of birth. Another 83 health workers were trained to report pregnancies to health facilities and to inform the communities about Hepatitis B prevention.

In June 2005, two groundbreaking donations totaling nearly \$11.7 million were given to UNICEF from the Finnish government. The donations aim to boost the living standards of some of the world's poorest and most excluded children – including the Candoshis and Shapras.

Working with the Ministry of Health, the ongoing campaign aims to enable a new generation of the Candoshis and Shapras to be free of Hepatitis B. “The Finnish contribution is really going to give us an arm to reach out to more indigenous children in the Amazon,” remarked Mr. Franco. “They are the largest grants ever given to UNICEF in the region, and will benefit an estimated 100,000 children.” [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/peru\\_27351.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/peru_27351.html)

## Questions: (Express your ideas)

- 1. Why do you think the disease already infiltrated a lot of people in Candoshi and Shapra?**
- 2. How does hepatitis B spread?**
- 3. What are the symptoms of hepatitis?**
- 4. How serious is infection with hepatitis B?**
- 5. How common is hepatitis B in your country?**
- 6. Role play: Give me advices in preventing hepatitis B**