

June 2, 2011 -A push to turn back the increasing number of reported polio cases in Sindh Province and eradicate the contagious and crippling virus from Pakistan completely is the focus of a top-level UN visit to Karachi.

The UN team is made up of WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, WHO Representative for Pakistan Dr Guido Sabatinelli, and UNICEF Pakistan Representative, Dan Rohrmann. During their visit to Karachi today – in support of the Ministry of Health’s polio eradication efforts – the team met with polio staff working in both Sindh and Balochistan Provinces, along with the Governor of Sindh. The discussion with the Governor focused on successful implementation of Union Council-level plans, in order to achieve the target for polio eradication in Sindh, in line with the National Emergency Action Plan.

The increasing number of polio cases arising in Sindh as well as other parts of the country is causing mounting concern, particularly as the polio virus is spreading fast even though it is currently the low season for transmission. Of the 44 cases reported so far in Pakistan this year, 12 cases are from Sindh alone. Other reported cases around the country are in FATA (18), Baluchistan (11), and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (3). The 44 total reported cases compares to 20 for the same period last year. Reported polio cases in Sindh represent nine infected districts/towns compared to only one case in 2010. Tando Mohammad Khan, Badin and Sanghar districts have reported two cases each, whereas Tando Allahyar and Thatta Districts have reported one case each. The infected towns of Karachi are Orangi, Sadar, SITE and Gaddap, all with one case each.

In Sindh Province, there have been issues around identifying and reaching children. During the May polio vaccination campaign in Sindh, an estimated 43% of the missed children could not be vaccinated because either the team missed the house or visited the houses but could not identify all the eligible children. This is the highest rate for vaccination teams not reaching target children in the world. There is also concern about the discovery of wild poliovirus found in samples collected from Karachi sewage water. Dr Gezairy says: “We must ensure the right vaccination teams visit every house in Sindh province. The vaccination teams in each town of Karachi must be made up of mature adults, who speak the language of their communities, and who are properly trained and closely supervised, especially in towns like Gadap”.

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