

Statement on stopping wild poliovirus transmission in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Thirteenth meeting of the Regional Subcommittee for Polio Eradication and Outbreaks

27 April 2025

Noting the resurgence of wild poliovirus transmission in Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2024, including reestablishment of transmission in historic reservoirs, that has paralysed more than 100 children in both countries;

Noting the extension to the eradication timeline as outlined in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative's extended 2022–2029 strategy that has increased total funding needs by US\$ 2.3 billion to a total of US\$ 6.9 billion for 2022–2029;

Appreciating deeply the funding commitment by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of US\$ 500 million to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), while noting with concern the recent funding cuts by some historic donors at a critical time for global eradication efforts;

Appreciating that the United Arab Emirates and His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan have invested heavily in polio eradication efforts in the Region, most recently in the Gaza Strip, and have historically supported Pakistan's polio programme through the UAE-Pakistan Assistance Programme, as well as the continued funding by many of the donors to the GPEI, such as Rotary International and the Gates Foundation;

Noting that Afghanistan and Pakistan constitute one epidemiological bloc and share transmission dynamics, with extensive cross-border population movements that necessitate coordinated polio eradication efforts;

Acknowledging with concern the increasing insecurity hampering implementation of scheduled polio vaccination activities, particularly affecting the northern and southern corridors for cross-border poliovirus transmission;

Recognizing with concern that a large number of children are being missed during vaccination campaigns in the South Region of Afghanistan;

Noting with concern the presence of a large number of zero dose children in parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan, who have not received their routine immunization;

Acknowledging the sacrifices being made by health workers and law enforcement agencies in their efforts to eradicate polio;

Acknowledging the strong political commitment demonstrated by the Government of Pakistan in the 2-4-6 programme strategy outlined in the National Emergency Action Plan for polio;

Acknowledging the strong commitment expressed by the authorities in Afghanistan to create an all-of-government and all-of-society momentum to optimize a site-to-site vaccination strategy;

Aware of the decreasing time and financial resources available to eradicate polio from Afghanistan and Pakistan;

Noting the remarkable efforts of health workers on the frontline in insecure settings, whose contributions are critical to the eradication effort;

Noting that women's equitable representation in the programme at all levels remains essential to achieve the goal of eradication;

Appreciating the renewed commitment and solidarity of Member States of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region who stand united to end polio;

Recalling that the international spread of poliovirus constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern under the International Health Regulations (2005);

We, Member States of the Regional Subcommittee for Polio Eradication and Outbreaks:

DECLARE THAT:

1. Interruption of wild poliovirus in Afghanistan and Pakistan remains a regional public health emergency and a priority;

COMMIT TO:

2. Mobilizing all necessary engagement, and financial and advocacy support, by all political, community and civil society leaders and sectors across the Region and internationally, to fully achieve interruption of wild poliovirus transmission in the Region;
3. Strengthening regional preparedness and response capacity through investments in surveillance, routine immunization and cross-border coordination mechanisms to ensure timely detection of and response to any poliovirus;
4. Investing in the transition of polio infrastructure and resources into national health systems;

REQUEST:

5. The international donor and development community and partners to continue supporting the national polio programmes in Afghanistan and Pakistan to facilitate implementation of their national emergency action plans to end polio;
6. The Government of Pakistan to fully implement the 2-4-6 strategy, including the recommendations of the recent Technical Advisory Group of experts, to reverse epidemiological trends and end polio during the next low transmission season;

7. The authorities in Afghanistan to fully support the optimization of the site-to-site vaccination strategy through a all-of-government and all-of-society approach;
8. The leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan to ensure a safe and secure environment for health workers at the forefront of eradication efforts;
9. Polio programmes in Afghanistan and Pakistan to strengthen coordination with routine immunization programmes to reduce immunity gaps among children living in some of the hardest to reach areas in both countries;
10. The leadership at all levels in Afghanistan and Pakistan to intensify coordination and collaboration on all aspects of polio eradication and to mitigate cross-border transmission of wild poliovirus through joint surveillance, tracking of missed children and strengthening the quality and synchronization of campaigns;
11. The WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean to fully support Afghanistan and Pakistan in their efforts to eradicate polio, including by advocating for all necessary financial and technical support, reviewing progress, recommending corrective actions as necessary and regularly informing Member States of the aforementioned, and of any further action required, through the WHO Executive Board, World Health Assembly and WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean.