

Press Release

Kabul, February 12, 2018

Today marks the first day in a polio vaccination campaign that will be carried out in the provinces of which are deemed to be at particularly high risk for children.

About 6.1 children in 23 provinces will be vaccinated. The timing of the campaign, which follows a round that ended two weeks ago, is planned to use the low transmission season to build up the immunity of children at risk.

The vaccine is the only protection against polio, a disease that paralyses children. There is no cure for polio.

In recent months, the virus has been isolated from the environment in Southern and Eastern Afghanistan. The presence of virus in the environment, coupled with high population movement between different regions of the country and with Pakistan, poses every child at higher risk of contracting polio.

In order to quickly build up immunity of the children and guard against the virus in the environment, every child of less than 5 years of age should take at least two doses in the short interval. Therefore, every child must be vaccinated in this round irrespective of their previous vaccination status. Children who missed the during the previous round and but are vaccinated in this round, should get their second dose in the nearest health facility after one week.

Polio vaccine is designed to be administered multiple times to provide sufficient protection against wild polio virus.

"The scope and interval of every round of campaign is designed by experts and is entirely based on the need of the children in a particular area; therefore, all children less than 5 years of age must be vaccinated in every campaign round, and a single missed opportunity can put the child in risk of contracting polio", said Minister of Public Health, Dr Ferozuddin Feroz. "The vaccine that we use is the best in the world, and the same vaccine used by every other country."

During the campaign trained polio workers will go from house to house in their communities to vaccinate children. On Friday, polio teams will re-visit households where children were missed the first time the vaccinators visited to ensure that all children are vaccinated and protected.

Polio vaccines have also been strongly endorsed by prominent international and local Islamic scholars, including the Ulama.

So far in 2018, Afghanistan has already seen three cases of polio, one in Nangarhar and two in Kandahar province. The campaign which begins today is the second of in total 9 national and sub-national vaccination campaigns in 2018.

The goal of these efforts is to completely stop polio transmission in Afghanistan in 2018.

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