

Kabul, 6 May 2018 – The ministries of Public Health and Education of Afghanistan today jointly inaugurated the second round of National Immunization Days (NIDS) for polio eradication in an event held in a Kabul *madrassa* (Islamic school). The event was attended by many Islamic religious scholars along with teachers and students.

The nationwide polio campaign will take place in the entire country starting tomorrow, 7 May and will last until 11 May 2018. During the campaign, oral polio vaccine (OPV) will be given to more than 9.9 million children under 5 years of age. In addition, deworming tablets will also be given to 5.9 million children aged between 2 and 5 years.

Dedicated polio workers who care about your children will visit your houses to reach every last child. It is critical that all parents and caregivers across Afghanistan ensure they immunize all children. Afghanistan has the largest number of polio cases in the world.

In his opening remarks, H.E. Minister of Public Health Dr Ferozuddin Feroz said: “The support of religious scholars is a game changer for the fight against polio. Islam emphasizes the importance of protection against diseases. The start of the high transmission season increases the risk of polio virus spreading and children being paralysed. It is important for all caregivers to get their children protected from the virus by vaccinating. We are closer than ever in history to defeating polio. There are only a few places in the country where the virus is still transmitting”.

The high transmission season for polio virus is about to start, and this is the last campaign which is organized before it. An important opportunity for parents to protect their children.

Speaking at the event, Dr Shafiq Samim, Deputy Minister for Islamic Teachings of the Ministry of Education, emphasized the importance health and well-being of all members of society, particularly the children, from the perspective of Islamic values. “Disabled and paralysed children will not have a bright future and it is the responsibility of parents to protect their children against this crippling disease by vaccinating them in each round of the polio vaccination campaigns.”

The representatives of WHO and UNICEF and a number of Islamic religious scholars also

spoke in the event, and stressed the importance communities cooperating with the polio eradication efforts.

The polio vaccine is extremely safe and very effective and has been endorsed by leading religious scholars in Afghanistan and throughout the Islamic world. Only Afghanistan and Pakistan have recorded any cases of polio in 2017 and 2018. While any child anywhere carries the poliovirus, all children around the world remain at risk of this crippling disease. The oral polio vaccine builds immunity gradually, and several doses are needed for children to be fully protected against paralysis. To eradicate polio in Afghanistan, it is crucial to vaccinate all children in every polio campaign until they reach age of 5.

Currently, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria are the only 3 remaining polio-endemic countries in the world. Nigeria has not recorded any cases since August 2016. Afghanistan has recorded 7 cases of polio this year and Pakistan has recorded one case to date.

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