

29 September 2020 – The Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan, in cooperation with health partners, began a polio vaccination campaign in 10 provinces of the country on 28 September. The campaign will be conducted for 5 days, during which 2 million children under 5 will be vaccinated across 112 districts of Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Ghazni, Logar, Maidan Wardak, Parwan, Kunduz, Baghlan and Nuristan provinces.

"The wild poliovirus is a serious threat to the health of our children. Fortunately, there is a very effective and safe vaccine against this virus, which is administered by our volunteer health workers to children for their protection and safety," said Dr Ahmad Jawad Osmani, acting Minister of Public Health. "I urge all caregivers to take wild poliovirus as seriously as the coronavirus and to vaccinate their children against the deadly and crippling disease at every round of the campaign. In so doing, Afghanistan too can eradicate polio forever," he added.

Since the beginning of 2020, a total of 49 cases of wild poliovirus have been registered in the country, with 33 in the south of the country, 8 in the west, 4 in the south-east, 2 in the east and one each in the north and northeast regions.

"The polio programme remains cautious of COVID-19 but with campaigns slowly resuming around the country, the programme has demonstrated that mass immunization can be safely resumed under strict infection prevention and control measures. We need the support of parents and caregivers to ensure that no child is left behind during upcoming vaccination campaigns," said Dr Rik Peepkorn, WHO Representative in Afghanistan.

Polio is incurable and can paralyse children for life. The polio vaccine is the only safe and effective way to prevent children from getting the disease. The Ministry of Public Health urges all parents and caregivers to ensure that all children are vaccinated during each campaign until the age of 5. Repeated vaccines help to build strong immunity among children and the whole community.

Currently, Afghanistan and Pakistan remain the only 2 polio-endemic countries in the world.

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