



22 December 2021 - A nationwide campaign to vaccinate 16.5 million children under age five with novel oral polio vaccine type 2 (nOPV2) began this week in Egypt.

Egypt is the first country in the Eastern Mediterranean Region to use nOPV2, a next-generation version of the existing type 2 monovalent OPV (mOPV2) that offers the same protection against polio infection and safety of use, but with a more stable genetic structure that makes it less likely to seed future outbreaks if high population immunity is not maintained. It has been used in seven countries and on around 100 million children, with no significant issues, and has been made available in Egypt under WHO's Emergency Use Listing (EUL).

This week's polio campaign is in response to multiple emergences of vaccine-derived poliovirus circulation in Egypt in 2021. Earlier in the year, circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (cVDPV2) was confirmed from environmental samples, linked to an outbreak in Sudan. Additionally, in recent months, environmental sampling has confirmed 68 separate emergences of vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 (VDPV2) collected from 33 sites in 26 governorates, with none of the emergences genetically linked to each other or to any previous VDPV2 isolates collected in Egypt or any other country.

Although no children have been paralysed by poliovirus to date, environmental surveillance – the testing of sewage runoff for the presence of poliovirus – shows that poliovirus is circulating in Egypt, and that immunity levels are not high enough. This week's campaign aims to change that by vaccinating all children under age five, from all communities across Egypt, closing the immunity gap and giving these viruses no place to go.

Preparing for and executing such a large-scale campaign has been no simple task, particularly in the midst of a pandemic.

Dr Alaa Eid, Head of the Preventive Sector at Egypt's Ministry of Health and Population, said the campaign aims to vaccinate 16.5 million children through 45,000 teams comprising 90,000 members, in addition to supervisory teams at all levels in the ministry, directorates, health departments and medical districts.

WHO's Egypt Country Office has provided support including technical expertise, preparedness and response activities and capacity-building.

"WHO continues to work diligently with national health authorities and all partners to protect everyone living in Egypt to sustain Egypt polio-free since 2006," Dr Naeema Al Gasseer, Representative of WHO in Egypt and Head of Mission, said.

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