

Baghdad, Iraq, 15 April 2014 – In line with its response to the polio outbreak in Iraq, the World Health Organization conducted two awareness-raising sessions on acute flaccid paralysis (AFP) surveillance for national surveillance officers from 17 governorates.

The first session was held in the Royal Tulip Hotel in Baghdad on 13 April 2014 and was attended by 30 participants. Both sessions were facilitated by Dr Tarek Elseyed, Polio Medical Officer in the WHO Regional Office in Cairo, Egypt.

In the first session, the AFP case and its different diagnosis were defined, emphasizing the importance of AFP early reporting and the steps that should be taken afterwards. It also approached the reverse cold chain, the different surveillance indicators and their interpretations, and the importance of a highly-sensitive AFP surveillance system for the eradication of poliomyelitis.

On 14 April, a second session was held at the Ministry of Health in Baghdad with the attendance of 27 participants who were medical officers, mainly pediatricians, working in a number of hospitals in Baghdad in addition to surveillance focal points from different health sectors in the governorate. This session was important for Baghdad given the fact that it represents a high-risk area concerning the circulation of the wild virus, in addition to the fact that the only polio case in the country was reported from Baghdad, Rasafa sector. The session was further attended by the national Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) manager and was carried out in an interactive way. All attendees requested WHO to support awareness raising sessions regularly specially during the national immunization days and subnational immunization days.

WHO, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF in Iraq concluded a nationwide polio vaccination campaign, the first since a case of polio was confirmed by the Iraqi Ministry of Health in Baghdad on 30 March 2014 after 14 years of polio free declaration.

The campaign was extended for four more days in governorates of Diwaniya, Duhok, and Najaf to conclude activities on 14 April 2014. Field independent monitoring activities started as well and will last for the coming four days, implemented by WHO through recruited teams from the Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS).

However, the nationwide immunization rounds were scheduled to cover all parts of Iraq; WHO collaborative response to the outbreak is meant to reach the millions of vulnerable children under the age of 5 years.

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