



26 November 2023, Baghdad, Iraq – WHO in Iraq, in close collaboration with Iraq’s Ministry of Health (MOH) and Ministry of Environment (MOE), has concluded a successful 4-day training programme on the environmental surveillance network for poliovirus monitoring and detection. This initiative plays a crucial role in the ongoing commitment to maintain a polio-free Iraq.

The training programme centred on environmental sampling, involving the monthly collection of wastewater samples from designated sites in high-risk areas. These samples will be routinely sent to the Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL) to be tested for poliovirus, with the aim of complementing and enhancing the country’s acute flaccid paralysis surveillance system.

The training also emphasized the early detection of the poliovirus in Ninewa, in northwest Iraq, and Sulaymaniyah, in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. These high-risk areas were identified as priority governorates among other pre-established environmental surveillance locations in Baghdad, Basra, Erbil, Karbala and Najaf.

“In collaboration with our national counterparts in MOH and MOE, and guided by surveillance results, we identified 11 strategic sites across 8 governorates, with plans for a comprehensive expansion in the near future,” explained Dr Firas Al Khafaji, Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI)/Polio Officer, WHO Country Office in Iraq.

Comprehensive orientation sessions in Ninewa and Sulaymaniyah engaged national counterparts, partners, and stakeholders from the public health departments, environment department and municipal authority. These sessions were enriched by the remote participation of polio eradication experts from the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and national counterparts from the National Polio Laboratory in CPHL and the Communicable Disease Control Center.



Continued orientation and on-site training are in progress for personnel responsible for proper sample collection, packaging and transportation at the designated sites. The Al-Yarmouk collection site in Mosul serves 50 000 people, while the Darwaza site in Sulaymaniya caters to over a quarter of the governorate’s population of 1 million. This ongoing training is a collaborative effort involving key stakeholders such as WHO’s EPI/Polio team, the National Polio Laboratory (in CPHL), the Communicable Disease Control Center and relevant MOE departments.

“Together, we stand at the forefront, safeguarding communities and advancing towards a future where the crippling disease of polio is but a distant memory,” said Dr Wael Hatahit, Acting WHO Representative in Iraq, emphasizing the collaborative commitment to achieving public health goals.

This initiative aligns with WHO’s “Global polio surveillance action plan 2022–2024”, a crucial component to monitor poliovirus transmission, and integrates with the “Polio eradication strategy 2022–2026” of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. These combined efforts in Iraq signify remarkable progress in the journey toward a polio-free world.

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About WHO Iraq

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health. The WHO Iraq office works collaboratively with national partners to address public health challenges and improve the well-being of the Iraqi population.

About MOH

The Iraqi Ministry of Health (MOH) plays a vital role in shaping and implementing health policies and programmes to enhance the health and well-being of the people of Iraq.

About MOE

The Ministry of Environment (MOE) in Iraq is dedicated to preserving the country's environmental resources and promoting sustainable development.

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