

Ensuring every child in Baghdad is safe and free from polio



Baghdad, Iraq, 28 November 2019 – In Iraq's capital Baghdad, one might think that access to households during the current polio vaccination campaign would be almost impossible, given the ongoing protests. However, for Mr Mahmoud Farhan and Ms Hadeel Kareem who have been working with WHO as vaccinators for the last 16 and 5 years, respectively, this is not a barrier.

With WHO support and using a strategy of providing vaccination at fixed centres in health facilities and by going door-to-door, the 13,000 vaccinators in Iraq, such as Mahmoud and Hadeel, are ensuring that each and every child is reached with just two drops of the polio vaccine.

Mahmoud and Hadeel are going door-to-door in the Al Adeel area of Baghdad-Kerkh district. According to Mahmoud, vaccinating children in Baghdad and its surrounding environs has been his job for the past 16 years and this round is no different from the previous ones.

“People around Al Adeel know me, which makes it easy for them to bring forward their children for vaccination. Our religious leaders also did well when they passed messages to people during the Friday prayers urging them to open their doors to us during the campaign session. This made it even easier since we did not meet any resistance,” says Mahmoud.

“On the contrary we have people coming to remind us to visit their households as far as three to four gates ahead to vaccinate their children,” added Mahmoud, as he points out a lady who has come to request them to visit her home and vaccinate her children. This shows the level of awareness in the community about the benefits of the polio vaccine.

Mahmoud says that he is very passionate about his job because he treats the children like his own and vaccinating them makes him happy because he is protecting them from crippling and killer diseases.

With him, is his colleague, Hadeel, who has served in a similar role for the past 5 years.

“For me having a female vaccinator in the team is vital because female parents tend to relate well and open up to fellow female vaccinators, and so far the outcome has been very good”, says Hadeel. She adds, “Sometimes we don’t find children at home or get no response at the gates but that is okay and normal, in such cases we mark the gate and return to it later.”



Amidst the current political demonstrations in different parts of the southern governorates of the country, the Ministry of Health in partnership with WHO has launched the second round of mass vaccination campaigns for polio in 65 districts in 10 governorates as planned. More than 3.1 million children under 5 years of age from Baghdad, Babylon, Diwaniya, Diyala, Muthanna, Thi-Qar, Missan and Basra are being targeted for vaccination in this phase.

This will enable the Polio Eradication Initiative in Iraq to reach approximately 5.7 million children under 5 years with oral polio vaccine during a second round of Polio National Immunization Days in 2019.

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