

10 November 2016, Amman | World Health Organization (WHO) is conducting a polio outbreak simulation exercise (POSE) between 9 and 10 November to test Jordan's preparedness and capacity to respond to a potential polio outbreak. The workshop is being attended by approximately 60 participants including Ministry of Health epidemiologists, immunization, communication and surveillance officers, laboratory workers, university and private sector pediatricians, doctors from Jordan's Royal Medical Services, and focal points from Rotary Amman and UN agencies.

"POSE is a very useful tool to test just how ready and able a country is to respond to a polio outbreak," said Dr Cristina Profili, WHO Representative to Jordan. "Jordan has done a good job at keeping its children safe from polio but until the virus is wiped out globally, the country must strive to keep immunity levels high and must be prepared to act should the virus be reintroduced," she said.

Jordan has not seen a case of polio since 1992. However, outbreaks in neighbouring Syria and Iraq in 2013 and 2014 put the country at high risk of reinfection. With wild polio transmission still occurring in endemic Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as in Nigeria, countries around the world including Jordan are working to increase levels of immunization coverage against polio and strengthen surveillance systems to detect traces of the virus. As an added measure, they are putting into place and testing tailored national plans to deal with an outbreak.

"Polio outbreak preparedness and response plans already exist in Jordan," said Dr Tarek Abdelrahman Elsayed, WHO technical officer and POSE workshop coordinator. "The objective of the POSE training is to make sure these plans are airtight and to upgrade them according to the most recent guidelines. We work with participants so that they are familiar with current protocols and procedures in responding to [polio] outbreaks," he added.

The POSE will cover four main areas of polio outbreak preparedness and response: coordination, immunization, surveillance for acute flaccid paralysis – a major indicator for polio, and communication and social mobilization. Since the beginning of the year, WHO has worked with Ministries of Health and partners to conduct POSE activities in 10 countries within its Eastern Mediterranean Region, including Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya (in Tunisia), Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. It is planned that Kuwait, Oman, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates will complete the POSE by April 2017.

“The simulation exercise gives participants a chance to put theory into practice, exposing them to the realities of a polio outbreak,” said Dr Elsayed. “Through rigorous testing of national plans, the activity acts as a refresher on what to expect in the event of a polio outbreak, and what must be done to enable coordinated and efficient response action,” he said.

Note to journalists

The fight to end polio is led by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, which includes Rotary International, UNICEF, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and governments of the world, with the support of many others around the globe.

This year, there have been 32 cases of polio globally, in only three countries – Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria.

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