



1 June 2023, Tripoli – The World Health Organization, in cooperation with the Libyan National Centre for Disease Control and Ministry of Health, held a 2-day polio outbreak simulation exercise in Tripoli on 28 and 29 May 2023.

The purpose of the exercise was to test and validate plans, processes and systems to respond to an eventual polio outbreak in the country. A wide range of experts participated in the simulation. They included polio surveillance officers, outbreak response teams, staff from the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) and specialists from Libya’s network of emergency operations centres.

Dr Haider Al-Sayeh, Director-General of the National Centre for Disease Control, said that his teams were continuously updating the national plan for preparing and responding to a polio outbreak in the country. “We are working to improve communication, cooperation and coordination at different levels, including studying all possible scenarios to ensure we are well prepared to deal with any outbreak.”

Ms Elizabeth Hoff, WHO Representative in Libya, said that simulation exercises were vital to review planning assumptions, procedures and guidelines and assess and test the interoperability of the different elements of a polio outbreak response. “The risk of a polio outbreak in Libya remains all too real. WHO is helping the National Centre for Disease Control strengthen preparedness and put procedures in place to support an optimal response to any such outbreak. At the same time, we are continuing to support the Libya’s polio vaccination programme and ensure that every child is vaccinated against this life-threatening disease.”

Libya has been polio-free since 1991. The Libyan EPI is among the strongest in the Region. However, the presence of internally displaced persons and refugees and the ongoing influx of migrants from polio-infected countries place it at significant risk for imported polioviruses and the circulation of vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2. WHO recommends that all countries remain vigilant and strengthen their polio surveillance systems and vaccination programmes. Also, Libya is the second country in the Region to conduct the polio outbreak simulation exercise since the COVID-19 pandemic.

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