



Every day, thousands of local and international public health workers, community members, and volunteers on all sides of this conflict risk their lives to deliver basic services, including and especially immunization, to all Syrians. Photo credit: Tarik Jasarevic/WHO. 3 February, Homs, Syria – The queue was already formed when three volunteer polio vaccinators arrived at ‘Mohammed El Durra’ school in Homs that was transformed last year into a shelter for over 500 displaced people.

“This is the third time my two children are getting immunized here,” says Ms Mirvat Baraq, as men and women bring children under the age of five to receive drops of oral polio vaccine (OPV). In less than two hours, 120 children residing in the shelter were immunized yesterday, the first day of February’s vaccination round.

Supported by the World Health Organization and UNICEF, this is the fourth vaccination campaign across Syria since the outbreak of polio was confirmed last October. To date, 23 laboratory-confirmed cases have been reported by the Government.



Dr Hala Bediwi takes part in vaccination at an internally displaced person shelter in Homs. Photo credit: Tarik Jasarevic/WHO. Homs is one of the most affected Syrian cities with a number of locations in and around the city contested between government and armed opposition groups. The Greater Homs governorate has a population of 1.8 million and hosts an additional 500 000 displaced people. An estimated 40% are in need of humanitarian assistance.

The last round of polio vaccination in January saw more than 164 000 children reached in Homs governorate. "Yesterday, we vaccinated over 28 000 children. We hope that at the end of the week we will have reached more children than in previous rounds," says Dr Hala Bediwi, from the WHO Homs office, "However in three localities in the governorate vaccination did not take place because of lack of access."

### **Important achievements**

Preliminary results from the last round of the campaign in January suggest that 2.5 million children were vaccinated in Syria, more than at any time in the last 2 years. WHO and UNICEF estimates clearly indicate that immunization coverage declined from 90% in 2010, to less than 70% in 2012, nationwide.

Some children are still unreached, however, including in besieged communities, requiring further efforts to ensure vaccines are available in every part of the country so all Syrian children can get immunized.

"Halfway through the Syrian polio outbreak response, many critical programme indicators are improving, particularly in terms of access to vaccine, coverage and surveillance performance," says Dr Bruce Aylward WHO's Assistant Director-General for Polio and Emergencies.



Children in a Homs kindergarten hold up their hands to show they have been vaccinated. Photo credit: Tarik Jasarevic/WHO. Following confirmation of the polio outbreak, Ministers of Health from across the Region declared polio a regional public health emergency on 30 October. A multi-country strategic plan for the outbreak has been developed to reach more than 23 million children multiple times across seven countries. It is the largest ever immunization response across the Middle East.

**Related links**

[Questions and Answers: World Health Organization and United Nations Agency support to the Syrian crisis and polio outbreak](#)

[Read WHO's response to the polio crisis in Syria in The Lancet](#)

Saturday 17th of May 2025 10:20:56 AM